

HENRY CORBIN

Avicenna  
AND THE  
VISIONARY RECITAL

*Translated from the French by*

WILLARD R. TRASK

BOLLINGEN SERIES LXVI

PANTHEON BOOKS

copyright 1960 by Bollingen Foundation, New York, N. Y.  
Published for Bollingen Foundation  
by Pantheon Books Inc., New York, N. Y.

THIS IS THE SIXTY-NINTH IN A SERIES OF WORKS  
SPONSORED BY AND PUBLISHED FOR  
BOLLINGEN FOUNDATION

Originally published in French as  
Avicenne et le recit visionnaire  
departement d'Iranologie de l'Institut Franco-Iranien, Teheran, and  
Librarie d'Amerique et d'Orient Adrien-Maisonneuve, Paris,

Library of Congress Catalogue Card No.: 59-5335  
Manufactured in the United States of America  
by Kingsort Press, Inc., Kingsport, Tennessee  
Design by Andor Braun

CONTENTS

Preface	IX
---------	----

PART I. THE CYCLE OF AVICENNAN RECITALS 1

I. Avicennan Cosmos and Visionary Recital	
1. Avicennism and Philosophical Situation	3
2. The Cosmic Crypt: The Stranger and the Guide	16
3. Ta'wil as Exegesis of the Soul	28
4. The Cycle of Recitals or the Journey into the Orient	35
II. Avicennism and Angelology	46
5. The Angel, Spirit and Intelligence	46
6. The Archangels-Cherubs or Intelligences	56
7. The Celestial Angels or Souls	68
8. Angelic Pedagogy and Individuation	77
9. The Number of the Celestial Spheres	93
10. Latin Avicennism, and Iranian Avicennism	101
III. The Recital of Hayj ibn Yaqzan	123
11. Composition and Authenticity of the Recital; Commentaries and Manuscripts	123
12. Translation of the Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan	137
13. Orientation	151
IV. The Recital of the Bird	165
14. The Celestial Ascent (Mi'raj-Namah)	165
15. The Bird as Symbol	178
16. The Avicennan Recital and Its Persian Translations	183

## Contents

17. <i>Translation of the Recital of the Bird</i>	186
18. <i>From Avicenna's Recital to 'Attar's Mystical Epic</i>	193
V. The Recital of <i>Salaman and Absal</i>	204
19. <i>The Two Versions of the Recital</i>	204
20. <i>The Hermetic Version of Salaman and Absal</i>	208
21. <i>The Avicennan Version of Salaman and Absal</i>	223
Epilogue; or, Avicennan Perspectives	242
<i>Avicennism and Imamism</i>	243
<i>Symbolism and Presence</i>	257
Postscript. Recent Studies on Avicenna's "Oriental Philosophy"	271

## PART II

TRANSLATION OF THE PERSIAN COMMENTARY ON THE <i>RECITAL OF HAYY IBN YAQZAN</i>	279
1. <i>Prologue</i>	282
8. <i>The Encounter with the Angel</i>	
3. <i>The Salutation</i>	289
4. <i>Beginning of the Initiation: The Name and Person of the Angel</i>	292
6. <i>Physiognomy</i>	295
6. <i>The Two Ways for the Soul</i>	297
7. <i>The Soul's Three Evil Companions</i>	299
8. <i>How to Treat the Three Companions</i>	305
9. <i>The Conditions of the Journey</i>	308
10. <i>The Orient and Occident of the Universe</i>	319
11. <i>The Spring of Life</i>	321
12. <i>The Darkness about the Pole</i>	324
1.1. <i>The Occident of the World</i>	327
14. <i>The Clime of Terrestrial Matter</i>	331
15. <i>The Clime of Celestial Matter</i>	333
16. <i>The Celestial Spheres</i>	336
17. <i>'Inward the Orient: The Clime of Elementary Forms and the Forms of Species</i>	343

## Contents

18. <i>The Kingdom of the Soul</i>	346
19. <i>The Demons of the Soul</i>	353
20. <i>The Genii of the Soul</i>	355
21. <i>The Terrestrial Angels</i>	357
22. <i>Angels-Souls of the Spheres and Angels-Cherubs</i>	362
23. <i>The Beauty of the King Who Is Like unto None Other</i>	372
24. <i>Those Who Emigrate Toward the Kingdom</i>	374
25. <i>"If Thou Wilt, Follow Me"</i>	379
<i>List of Works Cited</i>	383

P R E F A C E   T O   T H E   E D I T I O N   I N   E N G L I S H

THIS study was written at the invitation of the Iranian National Monuments Society on the occasion of the Millenary of Avicenna, celebrated at Teheran in the spring of 1954. So I shall begin by summoning up, with all the melancholy charm of remembrance, the splendors of that celebration, which was the occasion for redisclosing many forgotten aspects of the great thinker, today claimed by both parties but whose life in any case (980-1037) was spent within the boundaries of the Iranian universe and who was able to write both an accomplished and personal Persian and the Arabic language that is the "liturgical tongue" of Islam.

It was a great festival of the spiritual culture of Iran, a celebration all the more opportune because, except for a few great names, chiefly of poets, the lineage of philosophers, theologians, and mystics who have given that culture its originality within the Islamic universe is to all intents and purposes absent from the horizon of Western man. Its deeper meaning has no more been elucidated than the necessity for its mediating function between the Arabic world and the universe of India has been understood. For this reason many more works will be necessary before the Iranian spiritual universe at last finds its place and its genuine expression in modern philosophical consciousness. Only then will it be comprehended how and why the same spiritual spring that gave the Iranian soul the power to pattern an Islam that is so typically its own likewise bestowed on it a special vocation in the face of the dangers that, in the Orient as everywhere else, threaten the very existence of the world of the soul. And every Occidental who comes to understand this, be he man of science or man of good will, must inevitably become a co-operator.

Indeed, the researches and developments necessitated by this book led us much farther than we had foreseen when we undertook the enterprise, and obliged us to encroach upon tasks that, then, were still to come. That is why we should have wished, at the time, to allow the theme to ripen more, had it not been for the insistence of our Iranian colleagues and friends.

Today we could not "touch up" this book without making certain extensive revisions in it; and to do so would be to destroy what was, after all, an essential moment that determined our later researches. It was, too, a moment that has its place in a whole congeries of events. Because of the troubles by which Iranian public life was affected at the time, the schedule originally laid down for the celebration of the Millenary of Avicenna suffered a lag of several years. And this had its effect on the present book.

For the use of future bibliographers it may be well to record the following data. A first edition of this work was brought out in the Collection du Millenaire published by the Iranian National Monuments Society. But its paradoxical order reflects the vicissitudes referred to above. In 1952 appeared a first volume, continuing the second part of the work. In the spring of 1954 appeared a second volume, containing the first and third parts. Some months later a new printing enabled the work to appear in a second edition as Volumes IV and V of the Bibliotlieque Iranienne, a collection founded by the author at the Department of Iranology of the Franco-Iranian Institute, in Teheran, and to which he devoted his best efforts during the long years of his continuous residence in Iran.

This second edition, at last, appeared in the rational order. The first volume contains the first part of the work—that is, the general presentation of the "cycle of Avicennan recitals." A second volume contains the original Arabic text of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* and the *editio princeps*, in a critical edition, of the Persian commentary that may reasonably be attributed to Juzjani, Avicenna's disciple and famulus, together with a French translation of this commentary, followed by notes and glosses (Paris, Adrien-Maisonnette, 1954).

It is, of course, the order of this second edition that is followed in the present English translation. The only difference is that the original Arabic and Persian texts are not included. The specialist can easily find them if he so wishes. Filially, I will record the fact that the second and third parts of the work (French translation, notes and glosses) were also printed separately in the UNESCO Collection of Representative Works, Persian Series (195s).

In addition to all this, we would emphasize the fact that this entire work, the composition of which, after the material was prepared, required several years, was entirely conceived, considered, and brought to completion in Iran. For this reason an exhaustive bibliography of the subject is not to be sought in it. Then too, we did not attempt to produce a work of pure historical erudition, since, for our part, we have no inclination to confine ourselves within the neutral and impersonal perspectives of historicism. What we have primarily sought to outline is a phenomenology of the Avicennan symbols in their Iranian context. Com-

## Preface

prehending symbols is an act that takes place in "time present"; it cannot consist in situating the past in the past as such—that is, in absence. In this "putting into the present," we were guided both by the dialogues that we were to have with certain students in the University of Teheran and by a wish to interest philosophers and psychologists in general in the world of Iranian symbols, access to which is still so difficult for the nonspecialist.

So, as we said some lines before, the years having passed, we could not "update" this work without violently severing it from the Iranian context from which it emerged, existentially, at a particular moment. For the same reason, too, its bibliography, aside from the original texts, is confined to what bears on our particular intention.

In general, this intention serves a twofold purpose. On the one hand, it is to elucidate the structure and inner progression that make Avicenna's mystical recitals an organic and consistent whole, a *trilogy*. These recitals, in which the thinker recaptures his spiritual autobiography in the form of symbols, belong to a literary genre that is characteristic of Persian culture. Hence the title we have given this book: *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*. If it is true that Avicenna's recitals were not entirely unknown hitherto, at least the Persian commentary attributed to Juzjani had remained in obscurity. Then too, it was the organic wholeness of this trilogy as such that had never been analyzed in relation not only to the philosopher Avicenna's own experience but to the very meaning of Avicennism.

This, furthermore, completes the definition of our intention. Some fragments of his works having had the privilege of being translated into Latin in the twelfth century, in the West Avicenna has chiefly, if not entirely, engaged the attention of specialists in medieval philosophy. Hence it was inevitable that he should always appear in the armor in which Latin Scholasticism clothed him. The result of this is a rationalization that strikes a dissonant note when one studies him in his Iranian context while oneself sojourning in the Iranian milieu. It is chiefly this that we have sought to bring out here.

I am well aware that it is this, too, that has caused a certain surprise by coming into collision with venerable routines. What I should further like to make clear is this: comprehending an author, especially a philosopher who succeeds in forming his own symbols, comprehending him (*com-prehendere*) in the full sense of the word, implies understanding *eo ipso* how and why his thought has actually been experienced in the spiritual milieus where he was recognized. For all this makes up an organic whole, of which the philosopher's thought is the seed and his experience the substance; all this makes up a structure of which that thought

and experience are the explanation. The usual procedure in this day is to pile up references to the texts that preceded the philosopher chronologically, in an at—**tempt** to "explain" him. I confess to a certain skepticism in regard to this kind of causal explanation. I have not here sought what might explain the philosopher Avicenna, but what the Avicennan experience itself explains to us. To do so was, in itself, to connect Avicennism with its Iranian context; and from this point of view, texts and persons chronologically subsequent to Avicenna are of no less importance than those that preceded him in time.

if precisely this strict phenomenological inspiration that led the present study to certain innovations has brought it a reception in which the author has found the most invaluable encouragement, these innovations themselves have caused two or three instances of misunderstandings, which are mentioned here only for the record. There are certain persons who cannot bring themselves to see Avicenna otherwise than as he was seen by the doctors of Latin Scholasticism. In addition, it sometimes happens that these same persons, usually for reasons of creed, profess a conception of mysticism and the mystical experience NO narrow that it would be utterly useless to enter into controversy on this point. Precisely this leads them to depreciate the most explicit testimonies to an experience that transcends the rational and "natural" realm to which they would fain relegate what is not in agreement with their dogmatic conception of mysticism. The result is a strange inability to grasp the organic connection among the moments of the Avicennan trilogy, and a no less strange determination to see, in the Recital of *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, for example, nothing but the "amusement" of a philosopher, a "harmless allegory." Yet we have made every effort to show all that differentiates symbol and spiritual meaning on the one hand from allegory on the other. Finally—and a matter of no less consequence—these persons affect alarm over the term "esotericism," whereas, in accordance with its Greek etymology, it merely expresses a notion current in every traditional culture: inward things, hidden things, suprasensible occurrences. All spiritual texts and contexts that have a reference beyond the letter and the appearance of what they state have an "esoteric" meaning.

The best procedure in the face of these ineptitudes is to follow the dictum of which our authors are constantly reminding us: each being can know and comprehend only its like. Each mode of comprehension corresponds to the interpreter's mode of being. I am too convinced of this not to confess that I cannot communicate the meaning of symbols to persons blind to them by nature if not deliberately. The Gospel parable of the rejected feast keeps all its meaning even, and precisely, in scientific life. It would be ridiculous to plunge into controversies

with those who refuse the feast; their refusal only inspires sorrow and compassion.

In contrast, I wish to record my gratitude for the devotion brought to the translation of this book by Mr. Willard H. Trask. Thanks to his scrupulous efforts to preserve conceptual nuances that are often quite foreign to the current thought of our day, the author is confident that he has safely accomplished the perilous passage that every translation represents. May Mr. Trask accept my cordial thanks.

The author is also happy, at the same time, to express his particular gratitude to the Bollingen Foundation, which kindly undertook the enterprise of this edition in English. There are certain aspects of a free spirituality that it is becoming more and more difficult to present to the world today; they are, so to speak, a lost continent that must be reconquered. All those who are in search of it will appreciate the effectual help of the Bollingen Foundation as an encouragement and a reason for hope.

H. C.

Paris  
April, 1960

## PART I

### THE CYCLE OF AVICENNAN RECITALS

# I. AVICENNAN COSMOS AND VISIONARY RECITAL

## I. *Avicennism and Philosophical Situation*

It is perhaps ambitious to propound such a theme at the beginning of a necessarily limited study. Nevertheless, we should not have wished to undertake the present investigation had we not entertained the hope that it would contribute to a better posing of the problems that become apparent upon a first attempt to develop the theme thus formulated. This theme can be understood in two senses. There is man's philosophical situation, as the Avicennan system defines it. And there is the situation of Avicenna's work itself in the pleroma of philosophical systems, his work as it appears to the philosopher who meditates on it today.

In the first case, we must meditate on such problems as posed themselves for Avicenna himself. In the second, we must meditate on the problems that Avicennism in its turn poses as an organized system. In the first case, Avicenna's thought is to be regarded as *situative*: its premises and their application themselves define a particular situation of human life in relation to that cosmos. In the second case, it is the Avicennan cosmos that is taken as a magnitude *to be situated*: the task of meditation is to understand and define its situation in respect to all the spiritual universes that the human being has borne within him, has expressed and developed in the forms of myths, symbols, or dogmas.

Now, in the case of Avicennism as in the case of every other system of the world, the mode of presence assumed by the philosopher by reason of the system that he professes is what, in the last analysis, appears as the genuinely *situative*



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

incut in that system considered in itself. This mode of presence is usually Healed beneath the tissue of didactic demonstrations and impersonal developments. Yet it is this mode of presence that must be disclosed, for it determines, not always the material genuineness of the *motifs* incorporated in the philosopher's work, at least the personal genuineness of his *motivations*; it is these that ally account for the "motifs" that the philosopher adopted or rejected, understood or failed to understand, carried to their maximum of meaning or, on the contrary, degraded to trivialities. But it is not very often that the philosopher attains such a consciousness of his effort that the rational constructions in which his thought was projected finally show him their connection with his inmost self, so that the secret motivations of which he himself was not yet conscious when projected his system lie revealed. This revelation marks a rupture of plane in the course of his inner life and meditations. The doctrines that he has elaborated scientifically prove to be a setting for his most personal adventure. The lofty constructions of conscious thought become blurred in the rays not of a twilight but rather of a dawn, from which figures always foreboded, awaited, and loved rise into view.

Avicenna's cycle of visionary recitals has precisely this meaning and this bearing. The recitals situate the man Avicenna in the cosmos that the philosopher elaborated, now in such an imposing monument as the *Kitab al-Shifa'*,<sup>1</sup> now in many another major or minor treatise. By substituting a dramaturgy for cosmology, the recitals guarantee the genuineness of this universe; it is verily the place of a personally lived adventure. At the same time, they seem to dictate an answer to the question *of where* to situate Avicennism in the pleroma of philosophical systems. They make it impossible to relegate it to a definitively dead and transcended past. They are the repository of an imperious lesson, the lesson that we must assimilate when, philosophers of the Orient and philosophers of the Occident, we together interrogate ourselves concerning the significance of Avicennism for our destiny as philosophers, that is, for what we are bound to profess in this world. Avicennism had different destinies in the

1. For all words with Arabic roots, the vocalization employed follows the classic system of transcription; for words with Iranian roots, it is rather the result of a compromise. The izafat is expressed by the vowel e, corresponding to its real value (and not by the vowel i). Naturally, all names of origin (nisba) formed on a Persian word are

expressed without the Arabic article. All Koranic references are given in accordance with the type of edition of the Koran current in Iran; the numbering of the verses corresponds to that of the Flugel edition. [For full titles of references, see the List of Works Cited.]

## Avicennism and Philosophical Situation

Orient and in the Occident. In Iran it is represented by a tradition that has remained unbroken down to our day through many vicissitudes. That tradition must decide its own reasons for existence by deciding its own future. Its future can be decided in a positive sense only on one condition—that the traditional philosophy, nourished on Avicennan motifs, shall not drowse on in the murmur of the old formulas but shall be capable of again daring, on its own account and in our present-day world, the spiritual adventure that Avicenna himself dared: the adventure of which he has left us the recital, or rather the recitals, and without which his work would be in danger of no longer representing anything but paper smudged with ink.

The recitals that compose this cycle are three in number: the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, the *Recital of the Bird*, and the *Recital of Salaman and Absal*. I shall later explain why I deliberately use this term "recital" here, and not simply "history" or "story," still less "allegory." It would seem that no one has yet attempted to meditate on these three recitals together, to understand them as a "cycle." This is the intention to which the present publication corresponds: their content itself has been the justification for arranging the recitals in a trilogy. It would also seem that no one has yet thought of meditating on them in their particular relation to the philosopher's work, in the sense that we suggested at the beginning of this study. Their "valorization" has suffered thereby. However, they have not remained unknown. In the last century, the Danish orientalist A. F. Mehren did pioneer work in this respect.<sup>2</sup> Yet perhaps the conditions of their publication at that time are partly responsible for the indifference we have noted. It is not to detract from Mehren's accomplishment to record the fact that, if he first made accessible texts composed in a difficult Arabic, the translations or summaries in French with which he accompanied them were so colorless that any efforts to overcome their obvious banalities had the excuse of being discouraged in advance. A completely new attempt needed to be made to communicate to the soul of the Western reader something of the emotion, of the note of truth—something, indeed, of the secret of Avicenna's personal experience—that these recitals contain.

We were ourselves led to the enterprise by a road that had its point of departure not in the Avicennan canon itself but in a somewhat later canon, that of the master of Ishraq, Shihabaddin Suhrawardi, who died a martyr's death in

2. Cf. *Traites mystiques d'Avicenne*. As *Absal* has come down to us only in the summary of it that Nasiraddin Tusi included in his Avicennan version of the *Recital of Salaman and Absal* and his commentary on the *Isharat*.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

Aleppo at the age of thirty-eight, victim of the obloquy of the doctors of the Law. And indeed the two canons together have given the Iranian philosophical genius its most original stamp. The thought of these two masters has nourished all the philosophers who have succeeded one another in Iran down to our day, including the Renaissance of which the Ispahan of the Safawid period was the scene and the symbol. In Iran it is customary to divide philosophers into *Mashsha'un*, Peripatetics or disciples of Aristotle, and *Ishraqiyun*, theosophists of Ishraq or of the Orient of Pure Lights. Yet we should not find an Ishraqi who was not also, and perforce, an Avicennan to some extent. And it would be difficult to find an Avicennan who was a Peripatetic in all things and for all purposes. It is this perpetual interpenetration that permits a concrete consideration of the notion of "Oriental philosophy" that was initiated by Suhrawardi but had been already defined—"outlined" would be too weak a term—in a recital of Avicenna's, of which a translation and commentary will be given later. Thus considered in the life of individual consciousnesses, the "Oriental philosophy" of the two masters reveals what they have in common, far better than any theoretical discussions, or hypotheses deputizing for lost works, can do. For the two canons, that of the one and that of the other master, display this common trait: side by side with extremely solid systematic works, they both contain a cycle of brief spiritual romances, narratives of inner initiations, marking a rupture of plane with the level on which the patencies successively acquired by theoretical expositions are interconnected. Having first of all undertaken the study and publication of Suhrawardi's recitals, we soon found ourselves faced by a question: what proportion of Avicennan inspiration was concealed, or even explicitly attested, in the Suhrawardian cycle of recitals?

To this question the present essay, and the translations with their accompanying notes, especially that of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, hope to supply an element of positive reply. Yet we should not have determined to present this sketch if we had not been solicited to do so with particular urgency. Some years ago, at Istanbul, during the course of a period of work at the Library of Santa Sophia (Aya Sofia), a lucky error in a shelf mark brought me a quite different manuscript from the one I was expecting, but which, in compensation, contained the Persian translation of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* with a commentary in Persian. The work proved to be old, and it seemed that no one had recorded its existence. In any case, it supplied a notable contribution, if not to the part of his work that Avicenna himself composed in Persian, at least to the Avicennan corpus in the Persian language. At the same time, it was an

## Avicennism and Philosophical Situation

invitation to resume' the study of the Avicennan recitals on an entirely new basis, focusing especially on the birth of that prose literature of philosophical initiation for which Suhrawardi was to give the impulse by a dozen compositions; among these, one—the *Recital of Occidental Exile*—has its point of departure in the Avicennan *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*; another is the Persian translation of the *Recital of the Bird*. Yet we should have deferred the realization of this enticing project until we had finished publishing the Suhrawardian corpus, had not some particularly solemn circumstance arisen to subvert this order.

The celebration of Avicenna's millenary in Iran was that commanding circumstance. To the amiable invitation to participate in it by an active contribution, the best answer was to offer this unpublished and considerable testimony to Avicenna's Iranian presence. The present study, then, will gather the premature fruit of meditations whose course had to be somewhat untowardly hurried. As it has shaped itself from these circumstances, Part I presents in brief the great themes that can best show the philosophical situation of Avicennan man in the cosmos, and give some notion of the situation of the Avicennan universe itself. It successively presents translations of the three great Avicennan recitals. Part II is devoted to a complete translation of the Persian commentary on the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, the work of an acquaintance and contemporary of Avicenna, perhaps, as we shall see, his faithful Juzjani. The text of the commentary is also given in this part. Finally, to Part II we have added a considerable number of notes and glosses on the same recital, the elements for a comprehensive study that we have had neither the time nor the temerity to realize in this first attempt.

Let us rather briefly sketch the aspect under which these recitals present themselves to us, in so far as meditation on them can be fruitful for that renewal of studies in Oriental philosophy in the Orient itself to which the millenary celebration was intended to contribute. They possess, we have already suggested, the interest of showing us the Avicennan philosophy not merely as seriously constructing a spiritual universe whose present meaning for us, men of the modern age, can be found only by recourse to, or by the roundabout way of, a conscious mediation. They teach us its present meaning directly, because they show us that universe not as an abstract magnitude, transcended by our "modern" conceptions, but as the repository of the Image that the man Avicenna carries in himself, as each of us also carries his own. The Image in question is not one that results from some previous external perception; it is an Image

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

that precedes all perception, an a priori expressing the deepest being of the person, what depth psychology calls an Imago. Each of us carries in himself the Image of his own world, his *Imago mundi*, and projects it into a more or less coherent universe, which becomes the stage on which his destiny is played out. He may not be conscious of it, and to that extent he will experience as imposed on himself and on others this world that in fact he himself or others impose on themselves. This is also the situation that remains in force as long as philosophical systems profess to be "objectively" established. It ceases in proportion to such an acquisition of consciousness as permits the soul triumphantly to pass beyond the circles that held it prisoner. And that is the entire adventure related, us a personal experience, in the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* and the *Recital of the Bird*.

This is why the different edifices that form the system of the Avicennan universe are no longer present there in the state of *abodes* that mold thought from without, but occur in the form of *stages* that the soul, conquering its own fetters, successively passes through on the way from its Exile. Their presentation necessarily assumes a candor and youthfulness of which great dogmatic expositions can show no trace. Philosophical readiness to conceive the universe and intelligible essences is henceforth complemented by imaginative ability to Visualize concrete figures, to encounter "persons." Once the rupture of plane is consummated, the soul reveals all the presences that have always inhabited it without its being aware of them. It reveals its secret; it contemplates itself and tells the story of itself as in search of its kindred, as foreboding a family of beings of light who draw it toward a clime beyond all climes hitherto known. Thus there rises on its horizon an *Orient* that its philosophy anticipated without yet knowing it. The figure of the Active Intelligence, which dominates all this philosophy, reveals its proximity, its solicitude. The Angel *individuates himself* under the features of a definite person, whose annunciation corresponds to the degree of experience of the soul to which he announces himself: it is through the integration of all its powers that the soul opens itself to the transconscious and anticipates its own totality.

This totality—*homo integei*—can be expressed only in a symbol. The genuineness of this experience of spiritual maturity is attested in the measure to which a being attains the power to shape its own symbol. This power, we may say, has fallen to the lot of an Avicenna, a Suhrawardi, to the different degrees of their respective geniuses. And because it offers us not only philosophemes to be studiously learned, but symbols to be deciphered, spiritual advances to be

## Avicennism and Philosophical Situation

accomplished, their universe is neither dead, nor surpassed, nor transcended. For in the measure to which an author rises to symbols, he cannot himself exhaust the significance of his work. That significance remains latent in the pleroma of symbols, inviting to fresh transcendences. It is from this point of view that we can hear the summons that Avicenna's work still addresses to us today, and particularly to those who, in Iran itself, have carried on the tradition. In these pages we cannot propound a program, still less offer solutions. That would require a work whose scope would perhaps exceed the capacities of an entire life. At least there are certain current questions that can be simply propounded.

A feature, among many others, characteristic of philosophical life in the Occident for more than a generation is the renaissance of studies in medieval philosophy, a renaissance with which, in France, the name of Etienne Gilson will remain linked. One result has been something that is not always perfectly clear to an Oriental of the present generation: Occidentals can be Thomists, Scotists, Augustinians, etc., without therefore feeling that they are "not of their time," if we may have recourse to this trite expression, so much abused because its meaning is not understood (for in fact it invites each individual to be not of *his* time but of "everybody's" time). Nor is this all: one can profess neither Thomism nor Scotism nor Augustinianism, and yet "valorize" these theological universes positively, and, without taking up one's abode in them, keep an abode for them in oneself. This is because what is involved is an interest far more decisive than the interest proper to a "history of philosophy," to a representation of philosophical systems in time. To explain the succession of these systems, their generation by one another—all this is extremely interesting, but it has nothing to do with the supreme question. In addition, it is necessary to understand the mode of perception proper to each of them, the *modus intelligendi* that is each time the direct expression of a mode of being, of a *modus essendi*. This task demands a whole spiritual "formation," and its results are in turn integrated into the sum of this formation. This is why the formation that it bestows on itself is the secret of a soul, just as it is the secret of its metamorphoses. The more perceptions and representations of the universe each monad integrates, the more it unfolds its own perfection and differs from every other.

It would be difficult to say that a similar situation prevails at present in the Orient. Here we see, on the one hand, an exemplary preservation of the traditional philosophy, and it is to the honor of Iran to have maintained its philo-

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

sophical tradition down to our day, through all hostile eddies of thought. Recent works hour witness to the presence of faithful Avicennans and Ishraqiyun.<sup>3</sup> But we may ask ourselves, not without anxiety, if this edifying preservation is not at the price of a renunciation, a closedness that keeps the spiritual organism from all interpenetration. For, on the other hand, there is a new generation that has undergone the shock of outside influences, and whose soul has been shaken to the point of being unable to valorize its traditional culture, which heroines for it a past definitively surpassed, if indeed it does not obscurely feel a little ashamed of it. Hut can a spiritual situation suffer itself to be shut in such a dilemma as this: either to keep itself from outside influence or to succumb to it?

To begin with, it must be understood that as long as the philosophical situation is experienced as confronting *things* that are separate from the soul in the manner of objects and that, independently of the soul, form "currents" in the manner of a river, the dilemma can arise: either to throw oneself into the current or to struggle against it. Neither of these decisions testifies to a genuine philosophical *formation*, any more than they contribute to it. It is not a question of struggling against a dying past, nor of accepting a past that is dead. Life and death are attributes of the *soul*, not of present or past *things*. The question is, rather, to *understand* what once made this past *possible*, caused its advent, was its *future*. To reapprehend this "possible" is to apprehend whether this past still has a future or not; here, precisely, one must not yield to the illusion that the decision is imposed by things. The decision of the future falls to the soul, depends upon how the soul understands *itself*, upon its refusal or acceptance of a new birth. Possibly we may even now catch a glimpse of the teaching that Avicenna can impart to us. It may prove that the *letter* of his cosmological system is closed to the immediate consciousness of our time. But the personal experience entrusted to his recitals reveals a *situation* with which ours perhaps has something in common. In this case, his whole system becomes the "cipher" of such a situation. To "decipher" it is not to accumulate a vain erudition of tilings, but to open our own possibility to ourselves. The dilemma stated above, which perhaps has a tragic meaning for the consciousness of the Orient—this dilemma has an exit. One cannot *free oneself* from the past without freeing *that past* itself; but to free it is to give it a future again, to make it significant. To deny it outright, or to cling to it blindly, are two contrary procedures that nevertheless arrive at the same end. Everything remains as it was, in the former case

3. Cf. Muhyiaddin Mahdi Ilahi Qum- *Asas al-Tawhid*; Ziyauddin Dorri, *Karḥ al-shahī*, *Hikmat-e Ilahī*; Mahdi Ashtiyani, *masa'il fi arba' rasa'il*, etc.

## Avicennism and Philosophical Situation

us in the latter: one has been unable to realize what no longer "signified" an what signified still. But one transcends only by adopting; what one rejects outright or what one refuses to see remains as it is, not integrated into consciousness, a source of the most formidable psychoses.

It goes without saying that such a significance "in the present" cannot stand part from the significances and values that consciousness at the present deposits as the horizon of human existence. But at the same time, for the philosopher there is a certain way of standing apart from them that alone permits him to act on the posited data. If, then, it is true that the problems of the philosophical consciousness in the Orient are inseparable from a general situation philosophers must above all never lose the sense of their vocation as men of the spirit: theirs not to submit to the data that emerge from the general unconsciousness; theirs, rather, to propose tasks—even if their effort is not to bear fruit until after they are laid in the grave. But precisely because the summons is addressed to men of today, it would be false modesty to conceal the difficulties and their profound causes.

A first symptom appears in the difficulty we experience in thematizing the complex of our philosophemes here, and in designating regionally, by an unambiguous name, the family of philosophers to which an Avicenna belongs. When we speak of Chinese philosophy, of Indian philosophy, and so on, the situation is perfectly clear; the term actually designates what it is intended to mean. But we run into difficulties as soon as we want to designate the region of philosophy that, from the High Middle Ages, extended between the Byzantine universe and the universe of India. This is because the philosophers are not the only inhabitants of the region, and because important changes have taken place in it during the last few generations. We referred above to significances "in the present." It would serve no purpose to conceal the fact that "in the present" the resurgence of the sentiment of ancient national cultures poses questions in this region that are quite new to philosophy. A new *Imago* projects a world for which the old classifications no longer suffice. Is it by ignoring the new delimitations which are still groping to find themselves because they are simply the feature under which consciousness tends to image itself to itself—is it thus that we should seek the "valorization" of the traditional philosophies?

It is neither by ignoring them nor by submitting ourselves to them. The message of the philosophy of the Spirit transcends all situations based solely on the interests of the present human condition. But it cannot make its message heard except in the concrete situations resulting from this condition. And when it

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

"disoriented," doomed to the most formidable psychoses. For it is then that the soul, delivered over defenseless and unconscious to the world of things, flings itself into all the compensations offered to it and alienates its being in them. Must the Orient succumb to philosophies that alienate man's being in the objectivity of things, just at the moment when the Occident, by various approaches (phenomenology, depth psychology, and so on), is attempting to reconquer the soul that—as in the Avicennan *Recital of the Bird*—has fallen captive in the net of determinisms and positivisms?

It appears that henceforth we must cease to separate the history of philosophy from the history of spirituality. Philosophy itself is only a partial symptom of the secret that transcends all rational statements and that tends to express itself in what we may comprehensively term a spirituality, which includes all the phenomena and expressions of the religious consciousness. It is upon this level only that we can together ask: *where* are we?—a "where" to which a geographical point is no answer. Nor is the *Orient* that rises in the last chapters of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* an Orient that can be found in our atlases. Nevertheless, it constitutes the answer, Avicenna's great answer, to those who ask across the data of his theoretical thought, beyond the rational statement of those data. It is on condition of being oneself *transposed* in *posing* the question that it becomes possible to *orient oneself*, for it is to this question that Hayy ibn Yaqzan replies by revealing what is the *Orient* that *orients*, and by permitting the soul thus to free itself from all the schemata of the world.

Let us, then, attempt to understand under *what heavens* this question posed itself to Avicenna or, rather, was posed by him. The undertaking here is not to analyze the historical circumstances of the gesture, but to, attempt really to **see** what the gesture points out.

### 2. *The Cosmic Crypt: The Stranger and the Guide*

If the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* appears to us the one that should stand first in the "cycle of recitals," the reason is that the initiation that it re-cites—that is to say, "again puts into the present"—teaches the fundamental *orientation*. It expounds that in relation to which it first becomes meaningful to speak of an *Occident* and an *Orient* of the cosmos. The possibility of this orientation once given, it likewise becomes possible to answer the question "where?" by indicating a *meaning*, a *direction*, that situates human existence. Here **the** answer

## The Cosmic Crypt: The Stranger and the Guide

will simultaneously *orient* the soul in the meaning, the *direction*, of its condition of *Stranger* and toward the necessity of an *Oriental philosophy*.<sup>9</sup> Precisely this attests the permanence of an Image motivating an *interpretatio mundi* that corresponds to and expresses it; its recurring projections permit one to trace the perpetuity and the palingeneses of the world of the Gnosis. The idea of this Orient is already formulated in the celebrated "Hymn of the Soul" in the *Gnostic Acts of Thomas*.<sup>10</sup> If the chronological succession does not suffice to give us knowledge of a causal historical filiation between these recurrences, at least we see arising between them the continuity of a "hierophanic time,"<sup>11</sup> which corresponds not to the external history of the sects and schools connected with the Gnosis, but to the cyclical presence of their "archetype," to their common participation in the same cosmic dramaturgy.

This dramaturgy can itself undergo corruptions and variations, expressing the more or less radical degree of pessimism that marks the Gnostic's particular experience of the world. The fact remains that the cosmogonic myth of all Gnosés has nothing to do with any attempt at a "prescientific" explanation of the system of the universe. If such a rationalizing reduction of myths could prevail for a certain period, it was doomed to fail lamentably of its object. The cosmogonic myth that returns with variants in all Gnosés propounds an *interpretatio mundi*—that is, a mode of comprehension, a fundamental and initial interpretation that goes beyond and precedes all external perceptions. Rather, this initial interpretation is what makes possible and *orients* all these perceptions, because it begins by *situating* the interpreter in a world, in *the* world that he interprets to himself; it is this interpretation that initially determines his experience of cosmic space.

Here the structure of space reveals to phenomenological analysis a particular sense of the cosmos, which experiences this world as a crypt.<sup>12</sup> Above the earth,

9. Just as Suhrawardi's *Recital of Occidental Exile* connects the words *ghurba* and *gharbiya*. World of Exile = World of the "Occident," as opposed to the "Orient," the world of the Angel. Even a metaphysics of transcendence can still be an "Occidental" philosophy, if it is confronted with the demand made here. Conversely, for a philosophy to be "Oriental," it does not suffice that it should be elaborated in a place that our atlases situate in the Orient. "Woe unto thee," Suhrawardi will say, "if by thy coun-

try thou meanest Damascus, Baghdad, or any other city of this world!"

10. Cf. M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 411 ff.; Hans Leisegang, *Die Gnosis*, pp. 137 f.; cf. also below, ch. III, §13.

11. On this concept, cf. Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, pp. 388 ff.

12. Cf. Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, tr. Charles F. Atkinson, I, 79-81.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

heaven curves like a dome, enclosing it, giving it the safety of a habitation, but at the same time keeping it as it were in a prison. It is this sense of the cosmic crypt that, architecturally, has found expression in the symbol of the dome; and this intuition of the world as a crypt differs as much from that which apprehends it as a "distance" offered in depth to passionate impulse (the endless space of the Faustian soul) as it differs from the antique intuition of the world as the sum of forms or of corporeal objects.<sup>13</sup>

Now, in this sense of the world there can be an ambivalence that, as in the Babylonian cosmology, projects the world as a structure of seven stories. From Posidonius on, and under Oriental influences, the enthusiasm of an astral mysticism compensating for the miseries of the terrestrial condition had risen toward just such an edifice.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, an opposite feeling can keep the edifice intact, but make wholly different signs appear in it by projecting upon it the light of a wholly different *interpretatio*. Instead of appearing as the supreme expression of the divinity, the regularity of the cosmos—that is, the ineluctable necessity governed by the course of the planets—will become an expression of the Antidivine. The planets, instead of concentrating the impulse of piety toward them, will impart a panic terror. This change in the sense of cosmic space will be motivated by the perception of a drama brought about in the pleroma of celestial beings. The catastrophe can be perceived as more or less radical as one passes from the Mazdean myth to the myth of Valentinian or Manichaean Gnosticism and arrives, for example, at the "drama in heaven" of the Ismailian Gnosis.<sup>15</sup> There is every reason not to conceal but to emphasize the profound variants of the myth and, with them, those of the experienced situation. The fact remains that the cosmos, the astral region with all its apparatus of power, will no longer constitute the totality of being. Even in Avicenna's cosmology, the Angels or *Animae coelestes* who move the spheres are also Strangers who have entered the "celestial Occident," just as the *animae humanae* are Strangers exiled in the "terrestrial Occident."<sup>16</sup> The realm of Light begins beyond, where the apparatus of cosmic power ends.

Hence all this edifice is there to announce and denounce his captivity to the human being, to stimulate him to awaken to consciousness of his origin. The

13. Ibid., I, 241.

14. Cf. Hans Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*, I, 161-62.

15. Cf. our "Cyclical Time in Mazdaism and Ismailism," pp. 151 ff.; we have already mentioned above (n. 8) the conflict

between Nasir-e Khusraw and Rhazes in regard to the myth of the Fall of the Soul.

16. Cf. translation of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, ch. 15, with the commentary on it, below, pp. 333-35.

## The Cosmic Crypt: The Stranger and the Guide

magnificent dome becomes a cage, a prison from which he must escape. The cosmic frontier of the celestial spheres is no longer experienced as unifying from within outward, but as constituting an increasing burden from without inward.<sup>17</sup> Under this burden a foreign life agonizes, and the sense of being a Stranger is certainly the dominant feeling in every gnostic, the feeling that gives his consciousness its power of exaltation. "There was I, sole and solitary, a stranger to the other dwellers at the inn."<sup>18</sup> Suhrawardi, the "reciter" of the *Recital of Occidental Exile*, will find himself cast into the bottom of a dark pit. The prisoner of the Avicennan *Recital of the Bird* will cry out his distress. The same dominant: "estrangement," the feeling of not belonging here, of being an "allogene."

It is by awakening to the feeling of being a Stranger that the gnostic's soul discovers *where* it is and at the same time forebodes *whence* it comes and *whither* it returns. As Suhrawardi says in his *Risalat al-Abraj* (Epistle of the Towers): the idea of Return implies a previous presence, a pre-existence in the country of origin, for "woe unto thee, if by thy country thou meanest Damascus, Baghdad, or any other city of this world!" This motif of Return presents two implications: in the first place, the feeling of a kinship with the divinity, with celestial beings, forms of light and beauty, which for the gnostic are his true family; in the second place, and in consequence, the soul, which thus at last finds *itself*, experiences itself as exiled, terrified and disoriented by and among the common norms, which assign to human beings reasons for existence and goals that are completely *strange* to its true condition of *Stranger*. For the very idea of celestial origin and kinship, individually raising *each* soul that becomes conscious of it to a unique and privileged rank, is intolerable to the world of common norms. Through their leveling tendency, these norms cannot but fail to know this or must make every effort to do away with all recollection of it. Then too, the soul that has awakened to its individuality can no longer be satisfied by common rules and collective precepts. It is not chance if the figures paired in the third Avicennan recital, *Salaman and Absal*, correspond to those of Prometheus and Epimetheus as they were interpreted by alchemical and Hermetic Gnosticism. The Promethean element obeys the individual soul, never bows to collective rule. Hence the soul *must* find the way of Return. That way is Gnosis, and on that way it needs a Guide. The Guide appears to it at the frontier where it has already emerged from this cosmos, to return—or, better, to emerge—to itself. This is the initial Event of both the Avicennan *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* and of Suhra-

17. Cf. Jonas, I, 163-64.

18. Cf. *Acts of Thomas*, in James, p. 412.



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

wardi's little treatise, *Gabriel's Wing*.<sup>19</sup> There is synchronism between the soul's awakening to itself and its visualization of its Guide. The latter is the archetypal figure of our visionary or initiatory recitals.

The synchronism here gives expression to the structure peculiar to the individuality. It is not a matter of such a sense of the "self" as gives it the rank of a solitary autonomy, of a singularity closed upon itself. At the moment when the soul discovers itself to be a stranger and alone in a world formerly familiar, a *personal* figure appears on its horizon, a figure that announces itself to the soul *personally* because it symbolizes *with* the soul's most intimate depths. In other words, the soul discovers itself to be the earthly counterpart of another being with which it forms a totality that is dual in structure. The two elements of this *dualitude* may be called the ego and the Self, or the transcendent celestial Self and the earthly Self, or by still other names. It is from this transcendent Self that the soul originates in the past of metahistory; this Self had become strange to it while the soul slumbered in the world of ordinary consciousness; but it ceases to be strange to it at the moment when the soul in turn feels itself a stranger in this world. This is why the soul requires an absolutely individual expression of this Self, one that could pass into the common stock of symbolism (or into allegory) only at the cost of its painfully won individual differentiation being repressed, leveled, and abolished by ordinary consciousness.

A powerful source of psychic energy is necessary if the imaginative activity (that Imagination which, as the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* and Suhrawardi's recitals show us, may be either angel or demon) is to be capable of creating, beyond common expressions and outworn or interchangeable symbolisms, a sufficient field of inner freedom for the manifestation of the Image of this Self that existed before the earthly condition and expects to survive it. The event will take place in a mental vision, a "waking dream"—in a state, as our visionaries always define it, "between waking and sleep." Avicenna and Suhrawardi were among those who had the strength to configure their own symbols.

But, with this, we have still done no more than to state the Event of the

19. "It was a night in which . . . darkness . . . had spread even to the confines of the lower world . . . I took a torch in my hand . . . and walked until daybreak . . . I shut the door that gave onto the city . . . I wished to open the door that gave onto the country. . . . I saw ten Sages with shining countenances . . ." (cf. Corbin and

Paul Kraus, eds. and trs., "Le Bruissement de l'aile de Gabriel," pp. 65-66 and 57, n. 2). Compare the opening of *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*: the soul withdraws to "pleasure places" lying about its city, which is a way of indicating the state intermediate between waking and sleep. On this exordium, cf. p. 283, n. 1.

## The Cosmic Crypt: The Stranger and the Guide

encounter in its psychological aspect. From an indicatory schema, the idea of the integration of the ego with its Self becomes the recital of an Event that, in the meditations of Gnosticism, is real to the highest degree. To speak of the "Angels of which we are a part," or of their combat as of a combat that they wage for a part of themselves,<sup>20</sup> is to refer to a fundamental aspect of the drama-turgy shared by all gnostics, by all who are *strangers* to this world. The Self is neither a metaphor nor an ideogram. It is, "in person," the heavenly counterpart of a pair or a syzygy made up of a fallen angel, or an angel appointed to govern a body, and of an angel retaining his abode in heaven. The idea of syzygy is present at every stage of Avicenna's angelology. It corresponds to a fundamental gnostic intuition, which in every relation individualizes the Holy Spirit into an individual Spirit, who is the celestial *paredros* of the human being, its guardian angel, guide and companion, helper and savior.<sup>21</sup>

The epiphanic forms and the names of this Guide can be many; the Guide is always recognizable.<sup>22</sup> It may be the feminine angel Daena in Mazdaism, Daena again or Manvahmed in Manichaeism; it may be the Perfect Body (*soma teleion*) of the Liturgy of Mithra, to which the Perfect Nature (*al-tiba al-tamm*) corresponds among the Ishraqiyun, "the philosopher's angel"; it may be Hayy ibn Yaqzan, the *pir-youth*, corresponding to the *spiritus rector* of the Cathari; it may be the crimson-hued Archangel of one of Suhrawardi's recitals, or any other figure individualizing the relation of the soul to the Active Intelligence. In every case this figure represents the heavenly counterpart of the soul; it manifests itself to the soul only at the dawn, the "sunrise," of the soul's perfect individuation, its integration, because only then is its relation to the divine individualized. This figure may appear only post mortem (like Daena, like the Archangel Azrael); ecstasy can anticipate it to various degrees, from mental vision to the state of *raptus*: in this sense, ecstasy is an anticipation of death, as death is the supreme ecstasy. This relation of the soul to the Angel, as each time, *singulatim*, accomplishing the mystery of its fulfillment, is undoubtedly typical of the piety and eschatology of Gnosticism. It differentiates it from any premystical or nonmystical monotheism that situates souls as each equidistant from the divine Unity, and it establishes the connection, little analyzed hitherto, between angelology and mysticism. The corresponding vision is given at the

20. Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpta ex Theodoto*, ed. and (French) tr. F. Sagnard, pp. 100-01 and 139 (cf. English tr. R. P. Casey, pp. 57, 85).

21. Cf. especially Hans Soderberg, *La Religion des Cathares*, pp. 131, 174, 208 ff.

22. Cf. our "Cyclical Time," p. 171.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

beginning of our recitals. The same demand will in its turn individualize the relation of the Active Intelligence to the souls that have emanated from it, in the plurality of Perfect Natures, as Abu'l-Barakat expressly poses the problem (below, § 8). Perfect Nature again in Suhrawardi; Hayy ibn Yaqzan or "messenger of the King" in Avicenna.

We shall cite two instances of these visions in greater detail, for the exordia of Suhrawardi's recitals, as well as the exordium of *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, will exemplify the same archetype. Just as, in Avicenna and Suhrawardi, the "reciter" receives his vision either in sleep or in a state between waking and sleep, so the *Nous* ('*aql*, *kharad*) appears to Hermes while "his bodily senses were under restraint" during a deep sleep. It seems to him that a being of vast magnitude appears before him, calls him by name, and asks: " 'What do you wish to hear and see, to learn and come to know by thought?' 'Who are you?' I said. 'I,' said he, 'am Poimandres, the Mind [Nous] of the Sovereignty. . . . I know what you wish, for indeed I am with you everywhere.' . . . Forthwith all things changed in aspect before me, and were opened out in a moment. And I beheld a boundless view; all was changed into light, a mild and joyous light; and I marveled when I saw it." Later in the course of the vision: "He gazed long upon me, eye to eye, so that I trembled at his aspect. And when I raised my head again, I saw in my mind [*Nous*] that the light consisted of innumerable Powers, and had come to be . . . a world without bounds. . . . And when I was amazed, he spoke again, and said to me, 'You have seen in your mind [*Nous*] the archetypal form, which is prior to the beginning of things, and is limitless.' Thus spoke Poimandres to me." <sup>23</sup> It is of this ecstasy of Hermes that there is a trace in Suhrawardi, when the Form of Light replies to Hermes: "I am thy Perfect Nature." <sup>24</sup>

In the charming little book entitled *The Shepherd of Hermias*, which is so rich in symbolic visions and which was formerly part of the Biblical canon, the epiphany of the personal angel takes place under similar circumstances. Hermas is at home, sitting on his bed, in a state of deep meditation. Suddenly a person of strange appearance enters, sits down beside him, and says: "I have been

23. Cf. *Poimandres*, §§ 2-4 and 7-8; A. D. Nock, ed., and A. J. Festugiere, (French) tr., *Corpus hermeticum*, I, 7 and 9; Walter Scott, ed. and tr., *Hermetica*, I, 115-17.

24. Cf. our edition of the "Metaphysics" from the *Mutarahat*, in *Opera metaphys-*

*ica et mystica*, I, 464. In the "Perfect Nature" the commentators will recognize both the Angel who is the lord of the human species (Gabriel, the Holy Spirit, the Active Intelligence) and the personal Angel of the philosopher, individuation of the Angel of the species; cf. further below, ch. II, § 8.

## The Cosmic Crypt: The Stranger and the Guide

sent by the most reverend angel to dwell with you the rest of the days of your life." Hermas thinks that the apparition has come to tempt him: " 'But who are you? for . . . I know to whom I was handed over.' He said to me, 'Do you not recognize me?' 'No,' I said. 'I,' said he, 'am the shepherd to whom you were handed over.' While he was still speaking, his appearance changed, and I recognized him, that it was he to whom I was handed over." <sup>26</sup> In this dialogue we clearly discern the familiar Gnostic figure of the angelic Helper and Guide, **who** is the celestial archetype of the human being entrusted to him, and who is **also** the interpreting angel, *Angelus interpretis*, as in the books of Enoch, IV Esdras, the *Ascension of Isaiah*, etc., <sup>26</sup> and who appears as such in Suhrawardi's recitals and in the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. The angel of Hermas is sent by **the** magnificent Angel, the Most Holy Angel, in whom the context suggests that we should recognize the Archangel Michael. Indeed, there is here also a somewhat fluctuating relation of identity between the Archangel Michael, the Holy Spirit, and Christ. It has its homologue, among our Neoplatonists and Ishraqiyun, in the relation that makes the Archangel Gabriel, the Holy Spirit, **and** the Active Intelligence (*'aql fa"al*) discernible under the same figure. Now, it is Gabriel the Archangel who is the Guide on the *Mi'raj* (cf. below, § 14); but the Prophet's celestial ascent is only the prototype of the mental ascent to which every mystic is invited. The relation of each mystical pilgrim to the Angel of Revelation is then so fully individuated that his union with the Active Intelligence whose other name is the Archangel Gabriel makes him, in every instance, the seal of prophecy. <sup>27</sup> The event of the vision thus occurs in synchronism with a degree of individuation that declares itself under a twofold aspect: the awakening of consciousness to the soul's condition as a stranger, and, in

25. *The Shepherd*, Vision v, tr. Kirsopp Lake, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, II, 69. Cf. Martin Dibelius, *Der Hirt des Hermas*, p. 491.

26. Dibelius, pp. 494 ff.

27. Cf. the epistle of Sa'inaddin Ispahani cited in our "Prolegomenes II" to *CEvres philosophiques et mystiques de Suhrawardi*, pp. 53-54; compare also below, ch. iv, § 14. The promotion of each mystic to **the** quality and state of prophet or *Nabi* is a characteristic of the spirituality of the Ishraqiyun, the theosophers of Light, disciples of Suhrawardi. The identification of the Angel of Knowledge with the Angel of Revelation

makes it possible to homologize the vocation of the mystical philosopher with the prophetic vocation; Suhrawardian Avicennism then becomes a theosophy of the Holy Spirit and takes on the tone of a "prophetic philosophy." But if it can truly be said that *each* Spiritual, by entering into union with the angelic Intelligence, becomes in his turn the seal of the prophets and of prophecy, this is because the event takes place in a time that is not the physical time of the history of external, irreversible facts; cf. our "L'Interiorisation du sens en herméneutique soufie iranienne."

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

this emergence to itself, its meeting with him who shows it the way, its Guide, its *Nous*.

What is now the itinerary? Through what worlds and what interworlds must the Guide show the way, so that the Stranger may return to his original country? In any case the travelers must pass beyond the cosmos, must reach the archangelic pleroma, Na-Koja-Abad, as Suhrawardi calls the "Nonwhere," the pure spiritual space beyond the Ninth Sphere. The stages of the journey are recognizable and marked out in advance from one Gnosis to another, from the ascending series of the mysteries of Mithra to that of the *Miraj-Namah*. The vicissitudes and dangers, however, are entirely different; they vary with differences in cosmological concepts; these in turn differ in accordance with the way in which the cosmic dramaturgy is perceived and understood. The journey into the Orient to which Hayy ibn Yaqzan invites, and which the Bird of the *Recital of the Bird* will accomplish, rises from sphere to sphere, without having to confront the more or less well-disposed *archontes* issuing from the demiurgy of Ialdabaoth, the son of Sophia after her departure from the pleroma.

For its part, the Ismailian Gnosis, for example, will conceive the meaning of this celestial ascent in accordance with its own cosmogonic myth. The latter modifies the radical pessimism of the early Gnosis. To be sure, its mythohistory originates in a "drama in heaven" whose hero is the Third Archangel produced by the primordial dyad. But this Archangel has extirpated his own Iblis from himself, like an Archangel Michael gaining his own victory over himself. He has not fallen, exiled "to this world" from the pleroma. He was the demiurge of this world, but it was in order that his kindred might fight, might absorb the posterity of darkness—that is, the posterity of Iblis. Eternity, "retarded" by his fault, is already on the way to redemption through the progression of the Aeon, of cyclical time. It is from mystical heaven to mystical heaven, respectively represented by one of the degrees of the esoteric sodality, that the adept accomplishes his ascent, which is the cycle of his "resurrections."<sup>28</sup>

Avicennism describes no cosmic dramaturgy. Nevertheless, in succeeding one another, the eternal births of the Archangels of the pleroma also determine the genesis of the material cosmos; they imply a darkening from heaven to heaven, a zone of deepening shadow in the face of which we can divine that the situation of man in this cosmos will not be resolved by philosophical descriptions alone. It is precisely because the situation so described demands a real issue

28. Cf. our "Cyclical Time," pp. 162 ff., 168 ff.

## The Cosmic Crypt: The Stranger and the Guide

that, in the work of both Avicenna and Suhrawardi, the rupture of plane indicated in the visionary recitals takes place.

The Avicennan angelology will teach us how from the primordial divine Unity there eternally proceeds a First Intelligence or a First Archangel-Cherub *whose* being already contains a duality, since its own being is distinct from its necessity for being. The Archangel intellegizes his Principle; he intelligizes the **necessity** for his being by considering it from the standpoint of its Principle; he intellegizes the contingency of his being by considering it in itself. Out of this threefold self-intellection there proceed a second Archangel, the First Angel-Soul, and the matter of the First Heaven (cf. also below, §§ 6 and 7). Even from the eternal beginning of the pleroma a Shadow arises, which is propagated from heaven to heaven until, after the Tenth Archangel, the Shadow itself becomes the Active Intelligence and demiurge of our sublunary world, the nocturnal zone of Matter or terrestrial "Occident." From the very beginning, then, in the heart of being arises possibility, a possibility-not-to-be—that is, the part of nonbeing that the Archangel intellegizes when he considers his own being in itself, which being has no "why" except the necessity that causes it to be from the necessary Being. But then it is the latter that necessarily gives rise to this being whose being, by having the possibility of not being, has already crossed the threshold of nonbeing. Why must the necessary reality of the First Being originate its own limit? Let us here call to mind the modifications of ancient Iranian Zervanism, its dramaturgic changes, as Shahrastani cites them; here Zervan appears as an Angel of the pleroma from whom Light and Darkness originate, though it is true that he immediately conquers the Darkness.<sup>29</sup> We may compare, in Suhrawardi, the vision of the Archangel Gabriel with one wing of light and one of darkness. We could then place the angelology and cosmology of Avicennism as representing, in an ideal schema of speculative forms, the extreme development of the *attenuations* of the Zervanistic dramaturgy, as it **was** able, at this extreme point, to delude the monotheism of Islam.

This would not lead us to forget that we are, at all events, very far from the somber horizon of primitive Zervanism. The attenuations of it that will be presented in Shahrastani's account already include a denouement that has even now taken place in the drama in the pleroma, a victory over the powers of Darkness that seems to prefigure the phases of the Ismailian cosmogony. Then **again**, it is true that the celestial "clime," that of the spheres, originates in the

29. On these dramaturgic changes, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 135 ff.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

portion of virtual nonbeing contained in the being of each of the Archangels of the pleroma. This is why, in the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, even the Matter of the spheres belongs to the Occident of the cosmos, just as terrestrial Matter is its farthest Occident, the farthest shore of Exile. However, celestial Matter is entirely different in condition from terrestrial Matter, in comparison with which it is still an "immaterial matter." This is because, proceeding directly from the archangelic universe, it is, as Matter, in no sense the demonic Element. Each heaven is the thought of an Archangel, not of an Archangel fallen from his station but rather of an Archangel "saddened" by the limitation of his being. The Soul to which he gives origin is the moving Soul of his heaven, which, like it, has issued from his thought, and it draws on his heaven by the motion of nostalgia by which it is itself drawn toward the Archangel from whom it proceeds. Hence the celestial motions are here neither direct expressions of the supreme divinity nor expressions of a terrible and antidivine Necessity, but an immense symphony of desire and nostalgia for a boundless perfection.

The mystical earthly pilgrims of the *Recital of the Bird* and of Suhrawardi's *Recital of Occidental Exile* will, in their turn, but yield to a nostalgia that is the same as that of the moving Souls of the celestial spheres. Their exile, the wretchedness of their earthly condition, originates not in the original "sin" of an erring humanity that feels itself guilty and responsible before a judge, but in a "drama," a fall of being, long before the appearance of earthly man. He shares in this drama because he is of the same celestial race as the original *dramatis personae*.

Indeed, one of the most striking characteristics discernible in the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* and its Persian commentary is the kinship and homology of structure that unite and mutually exemplify the Archangels or Intelligences and the beings that proceed from them. Each of these Archangels or *Kerubim* forms a syzygy, a pair, with the Angel-Soul that proceeds from him, and this structure cannot fail to suggest the syzygies of masculine and feminine Aeons in Valentinian Gnosticism. Human souls, or more precisely their twofold intellectual power, are the "terrestrial angels" that have issued from the Tenth Archangel; this twofold power gives them a structure similar to that of the angelic pair that rules each heaven, with the difference that, through the exercise of this twofold power, it depends upon them whether they become angels or demons *in actu*. Like the *Animae coelestes*, the *animae humanae* are Strangers, exiles come from somewhere else. It will be repeated again and again that their relation to the Tenth Archangel (or to the figure that individuates him) is the same as the

## The Cosmic Crypt: The Stranger and the Guide

relation of each celestial Soul to the Archangel from which it proceeds. Already the *vita coelitus comparanda* takes on meaning here: it is *ad imitationem Animae coelestis* that the *anima humana* tends to escape from its exile by a movement that carries it, like the heroes of Suhrawardi's recitals, toward the Angel that gave it origin. This is why we may say that the cosmological function of the Angel, emphasized in the theoretical treatises, presents itself, in the experience confided to the recitals, as a soteriology. It is not in the course of the great dogmatic treatises, but at the end of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, that the Angel can say to the adept: "If thou wilt, follow me."

This soteriology, the encounter with the transcendent Self, which is at once the same and not the same as "myself," is, we have said, as it were in synchronism with the soul's awakening to its consciousness of being a Stranger. Works of philosophy, spiritual romances in prose, or mystical poems here furnish abundant documents for a phenomenology of the stranger-consciousness. In a philosophical treatise of Ismailian cast that is attributed to him, Nasiraddin Tusi makes a beginning toward this phenomenology, in striking figures.<sup>30</sup> What is the meaning of "coming into this world" (being cast into the depths of the cosmic crypt)? It has not, in itself, the meaning of a change in corporeal position: to qualify the situation in cosmic space will be possible only after *orientation* in that space. "To come into this world" is to pass from the world of Reality in the true sense (*haqiqat*) to the world that is doubtless real for ordinary consciousness, but which in the true sense is only figure and metaphor (*majaz*); this coming into the world means that realities in the true sense have become doubtful or improbable, suspect and ambiguous. "To leave this world," to reach the true world, will mean that this Darkness and these doubts are removed from a consciousness that passes from the state of infancy (*hal-e tifuliya*) to the age of maturity. To attain this true consciousness of the True Real is *eo ipso* to become a stranger to the world of metaphor, with which ordinary consciousness remains satisfied as a true world. To leave this world is not to "die" as those have died of whom it is said that they have "departed," for many of those who have thus departed have in fact never left the world. Their departure too is metaphorical, for it is not thus that, in the true sense, one leaves the cosmic crypt. Really to leave it, one must have become, or rather have again become, the Stranger—that is, a soul regenerated in the Spring of Life, having accomplished the passage of *return* from *Majaz* to *Haqiqat*. It is this passage toward *haqiqat*, Reality in the true sense,

30. Ibid., p. 171; cf. Najiraddin Tusi, *Tasawwurat*, ed. and tr. Ivanow, pp. 63-64  
*The "Rawdatu't Taslim," Commonly Called* of the Persian text.



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

that signifies exodus from this world, in the true sense. Such will be the case typified in the person of Absal, the mystical hero of the third recital (below, §21).

The idea of this passage, then, brings us to the most characteristic mental operation of all our Spirituals, Neoplatonists, Ishraqiyun, Sufis, Ismailian theosophists: the *tall* or *spiritual exegesis*. Its process is best fitted to reveal to us both the secret of the genesis of our visionary recitals (since it also provokes the situation that originates them) and the secret of deciphering them. The operation properly consists in "bringing back," recalling, returning to its origin, not only the text of a book but also the cosmic context in which the soul is imprisoned. The soul must free this context, and free itself from it, by transmuting it into symbols. This transmutation will be the Event of our recitals, which, by that fact, are eminently qualified to enable us to situate the Avicennan cosmos not only in the past but also in the present, by showing us the possibility of integrating it into consciousness. Thus to put it "in the present" would be to perform our own *tall*, and that, in sum, was the task proposed in the preceding paragraph.

### 3. *Ta'wil as Exegesis of the Soul*

We should like to devote an extensive investigation to the mental operation constituting the *tall*, but its boundaries are seen to grow constantly wider, for it was practiced in Islam by Spirituals of every profession; it finally appears as the mainspring of every spirituality, in the measure to which it pre-eminently furnishes the means of going beyond all conformisms, all servitudes to the letter, all opinions accepted ready-made. Doubtless it is in Ismailian theosophy that it appears from the beginning as a fundamental procedure, with an exemplary flexibility and fertility. It is here too that thinkers were led to reflect upon the operation itself and its implications, and here that we can be most speedily informed concerning a procedure that engages the entire soul because it brings into play the soul's most secret sources of energy.

*Ta'wil* usually forms with *tanzil* a pair of terms and notions that are at once complementary and contrasting.<sup>31</sup> *Tanzil* properly designates positive religion, the letter of the Revelation dictated to the Prophet by the Angel. It is to *cause*

31. Cf. our *Etude preliminaire*, ch. 5: **symbolism of the worlds**, pp. 74 ff. *tall* or **symbolic exegesis**, pp. 65 ff.; the

## Ta'wil as Exegesis of the Soul

*the descent* of this Revelation from the higher world. *Ta'wil* is, etymologically and inversely, to *cause to return*, to lead back, to restore to one's origin and to the place where one comes home, consequently to return to the true and original meaning of a text. It is "to *bring* something *to* its origin. . . . Thus he who practices the *ta'wil* is the one who *turns* his speech from the external (exoteric) form [*zahir*] towards the inner reality [*haqiqat*]"<sup>32</sup> This must never be forgotten when, in current usage, *ta'wil* is said, and rightly, to be a spiritual exegesis that is inner, symbolic, esoteric, etc. Beneath the idea of exegesis appears that of a Guide (the *exegete*), and beneath the idea of *exegesis* we glimpse that of an *exodus*, of a "departure from Egypt," which is an exodus from metaphor and the slavery of the letter, from *exile* and the *Occident* of exoteric appearance to the *Orient* of the original and hidden Idea.

Now, *what* does this *exegesis* or *ta'wil* lead back, and *to what* does it lead back? The question implies another: *whom* does it lead back and *to whom* does it lead back? These are precisely the two fundamental aspects that the contexture of our visionary recitals presents to investigation: the first aspect concerns the *ta'wil* of texts, the second aspect concerns *ta'wil* as *ta'wil* of the soul. Their synchronism and codependence here accurately define the "hermeneutic circle" in which a symbolic vision flowers, and through which every true interpretation of its symbols must pass. Other pairs of terms form the key words of the vocabulary. *Majaz* is figure, metaphor, while *haqiqat* is the truth that is real, the reality that is true, the essence, the Idea. *Majaz* contains the idea of *out-passing*, of passing beyond on the way to • . . . , whence meta-phor. But let us note well that the spiritual meaning to be disengaged from the letter is not to be thought of as constituting a metaphorical meaning; it is the *letter* itself that is the *metaphor*, it is the *statement* that is a trans-gression of the ineffable Idea. Here, then, we have the opposite of the patencies of ordinary consciousness, for which it would be the appeal to true realities, to spiritual beings, which would constitute a transgression of the letter. The *ta'wil* causes the letter to *regress* to its true and original meaning (*haqiqat*), "with which" the figures of the exoteric letter symbolize. We mentioned before (above, pp. 27-28) how this relationship *majaz-haqiqat*, movement of transgression and regression, determined coming into this world and the exodus that liberates from this world.

32. Cf. *Kalami Pir*, ed. and tr. Ivanow, . . . pas sahib-e ta'wil ankas bashad ke  
57 of the Persian text: "Ta'wil az awwal sokhan-ra az zahir-e khod bagardanad w-  
wa 'awwal' chizi ba'asl-e khod rasanidan bahaqiqat-e an barasanad."

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

The same is true of the pair of terms *zahir* and *batin*. *Zahir* is the exoteric, the apparent, the patency of the letter, the Law, the text of the Koran. *Zahir* holds the same relationship to *Batin* (the hidden, the inner, the esoteric) as does *Majaz* to *Haqiqat*; the *Ta'wil* must "lead it back" to the hidden Reality, to the esoteric truth, with which it symbolizes. "The positive religion [shari'at] is the exoteric aspect [zahir] of the Idea [*haqiqat*]; the Idea is the esoteric aspect [*batin*] of the positive religion. The exoteric is an indication of the esoteric. The positive religion is the symbol [mithal], the Idea is the symbolized [mamthul]." <sup>33</sup> In short, in the three pairs of terms mentioned, *Majaz* stands to *Haqiqat*, *Zahir* to *Batin*, *Tanzil* to *Ta'wil* in the relation of symbol to symbolized. And it is precisely this strict correspondence that will save us from the most serious error, that of confounding symbol with allegory, either here or elsewhere.

The symbol is not an artificially constructed *sign*; it flowers in the soul spontaneously to announce something that cannot be expressed otherwise; it is the *unique* expression of the thing symbolized as of a reality that thus becomes transparent to the soul, but which in itself transcends all expression. Allegory is a more or less artificial figuration of generalities or abstractions that are perfectly cognizable or expressible in other ways. To penetrate the meaning of a symbol is in no sense equivalent to making it superfluous or abolishing it, for it always remains the sole *expression* of the signified thing with which it symbolizes.<sup>34</sup> One can never claim to have gone beyond it once and for all, save precisely at the cost of degrading it into allegory, of putting rational, general, and abstract equivalents in its place. The exegete should beware lest he thus close to himself the road of the symbol, which leads out of this world. *Mithal*, then, is symbol and not allegory. The schemata formed on the same root are to be defined in the same sense. *Tamthil* is not an "allegorization," but the typification, the privileged exemplification of an archetype.<sup>35</sup> *Tamaththul* is the state of the sensible or imaginable thing that possesses this investiture of

33. Ibid., pp. 55-56: "Shari'at zahir-e haqiqat ast w-haqiqat bajin-e shari'at, w-zahir 'onw5n-e batin ast, w-shari'at mithal ast w-haqiqat mamthul."

34. This is a question with which hermeneutics in general is now greatly concerned; cf. Jean Danielou, *Origene*, pp. 145 ff. (on the confusions perpetrated, in respect to **Origen, between** typology and **allegory**);

G. G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 3rd rev. edn., pp. 25-28; our "Rituel sabeen et exegese ismaelienne du rituel," pp. 230 ff.

35. Hence the Persian title chosen for the present work in the edition reserved for the Collection **du Millenaire**, *tamthil-e 'er-fani*.

## Ta'wil as Exegesis of the Soul

the archetype, and this investiture, making it symbolize with the archetype, exalts it to its maximum meaning. The exaltation can in certain cases cause it to be understood as a hypostasis.

The strict connection between symbol and symbolized perfectly distinguishes symbol from allegory, for it is impossible to break this connection, to extend and disperse it into an infinite network of significations, by a mere substitution in which, on the *same* level of being and on the *same* spiritual plane, what has already been expressed is only replaced by something that could always be expressed otherwise. Transmutation of the sensible and imaginable into symbol, return of the symbol to the situation that brought it to flower—these two movements open and close the hermeneutic circle. This is why, if the exegesis of symbols opens a perspective in height and depth that is perhaps limitless, there is no *regressio ad infinitum* on the same plane of being, as a rational understanding might object.<sup>36</sup> The objection would betray a profound failure to recognize what differentiates the particularity of a symbol from the generality of an allegory, the flowering of a symbolic vision from the crystallization of a thought in a dogma. It is not a matter of replacing the symbol by a rational explanation, nor of formulating a dogmatic statement to contain the rational patency thus obtained by reduction. It is a matter of arriving at the experience of the Soul to which a soul has attained, of sensing the goal—not of causally deducing the source—of the Event termed *wiladat-e ruhani*, spiritual birth.

In other words, the *truth* of the *ta'wil* rests upon the simultaneous *reality* of the mental operation in which it consists and of the psychic Event that gives rise to it. The *ta'wil* of texts supposes the *ta'wil* of the soul: the soul cannot restore, return the text to its truth, unless it too returns to *its* truth (*Haqiqat*), which implies for it passing beyond imposed patencies, emerging from the world of appearances and metaphors, from exile and the "Occident." Reciprocally, the soul takes its departure, accomplishes the *ta'wil* of its true being, by basing itself on a text—text of a book or cosmic text—which its effort will carry to a transmutation, raise to the rank of a real, but inner and psychic, Event. This is what we meant above when we indicated that the twofold question of discovering what and *to what* the *ta'wil* leads back implied the further question: *whom* and *to whom*. It is because they imply this twofold aspect of a twofold question that

36. The objection was formulated by the Persian commentator on *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, cf. our translation, pp. 314-15, and pp. 314-17, nn. 13-16; compare our *Etude préliminaire*, pp. 70 ff. (on *ta'wil* as symbolic exegesis).

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

our visionary recitals are *situative* of their cosmos, and that the latter becomes *situatable* for us. (1) The text of the recital is itself a *ta'wil* of the psychic Event; it is the way in which that Event was understood by the soul that experienced it, the way in which the soul understood the sensible or imaginable context of the Event by transmuting it into symbols; it shows *who* was led back to his origin, and thereby *to whom* he was led back. (2) To understand this text in its turn is to perform a *ta'wil* that leads its expressions back to what they signify; is to valorize its symbols by raising them to the height of the Event that caused them to flower, and not by making them fall back, to the level of the rational data that preceded them (this, as we shall more than once have occasion to point out, is the principal defect of the commentaries that certain well-meaning authors have left us on these recitals).

The Event of the Avicennan or Suhrawardian recitals was *exodus* from this world, the encounter with the Angel and with the world of the Angel. For the Event to be expressed in its truth (*Haqiqat*)—that is, for its expression to restore consciousness of self as that of a *stranger* in the world into which the soul has been cast, and at the same time as an awakening to a celestial kinship and origin—this Event could not but be visualized and configured in a *symbol* that was its eminently individual expression (it is thus that Absal, Avicenna will say, for example, is *your* degree of elevation in mystical gnosis). For the Event carries us to the utmost limit of the world; at this limit, the cosmos yields before the soul, it can no longer escape being interiorized into the soul, being *integrated* with it. This is the phase at which the psychic energy performs the transmutation of the text—here that of the "cosmic text"—into a constellation of symbols (it can, on occasion, similarly be the transmutation of a human context—for example, the esoteric Ismailian sodality, structured in accordance with the archetypes of the symbolism of worlds). What the soul suddenly visualizes is its *own* archetypal Image, that Image whose imprint it simultaneously bears within it, projects, and recognizes outside of itself. Hence we must never tire of repeating that symbolism is not equivalent to allegory.

This, we confess, is a situation of which we were still far from aware when we published Suhrawardi's mystical treatise, *Gabriel's Wing*.<sup>37</sup> We could say that the Platonic myth, for example, begins where the effort of rational philosophy reaches its limit. *On* the other hand, we could note that our recitals (whether *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* or *Gabriel's Wing*) present us with no cosmological *datum* that it would not be easy to find and read in any work of philosophy—

37. Cf. our edition, pp. 10 ff.

## Ta'wil as Exegesis of the Soul

except, for example, for the secrecy that envelops the Ismailian *ta'wil* of the Koran. But the conclusion to be drawn from this is precisely that the symbols of our recitals have not at all the same function as the Platonic myth. Reducing **the** same to the same is, in general, the undertaking pursued by the highly rational commentaries on these recitals, but it neglects the transmutation whose consequence is that, instead of seeking a secret *in* or *under* the text, we must regard the text itself as *the* secret.

Our meaning is this: the cosmological schema doubtless persists (it is recognizable in the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, the *Recital of the Bird*, the *Recital of Occidental Exile*, etc.), but what is modified and changed completely is man's *situation* in this cosmos. The astronomical or psychic processes are henceforth perceived only under their symbolic form. It is no longer by the senses, but by the Image of the soul, that they are apprehended; by this Image, the processes perceptible to the senses are transmuted into psychic energies. Hence the cosmos is no longer the external object, the distant model, of descriptions, of theoretical inventories, of deductive explanations; it is experienced and shown as the succession of the stages of a more or less perilous exodus upon which one is about to enter or which one has essayed. Mere description of it no longer satisfies; *someone* shows you how to escape from it, because you are a stranger in it. This is an individual vision, expressible and communicable only through an individual symbolism, the symbol of your own individuality (whence the very personal stamp of each of our recitals). It is one thing to describe the ternary rhythm of the procession of the Archangels-Intelligences; it is another to perceive in yourself the summons addressed to you by the particular Archangel from whom your very being emanates ("If thou wilt, follow me," Hayy ibn Yaqzan will say), and to *relate* why, under what circumstances, and how you responded to it.

This is why, since the recital is neither a story nor an allegory, the appearance of Hayy ibn Yaqzan, for example, to the mental vision, the signification of his "person," the recurrence of his analogue in Suhrawardi's recitals—all this proclaims the culminating point of a spiritual experience in which the soul attains not only to consciousness and realization of *itself*, but is set in the presence of the Self to which it addresses itself and to which it can give many names. And this is an initiation that can be given and related only in symbols. It is not a *story* that happened to others, but the soul's own story, its "spiritual romance," if you will, but personally lived: the soul can tell it only in the first person, re-cite" it, as in the figure known to Arabic grammar as *hikaya* ("story," but

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

literally *mimesis*, "imitation"), in which, even at the risk of a solecism, the speaker reproduces the terms used by the interlocutor, just as, here, Avicenna will re-cite the teaching of Hayy ibn Yaqzan. This is why, rejecting the designations mystical allegories, or philosophical narratives or tales, we have chosen recitals, or visionary or initiatory recitals. The *ta'wil* of the soul—the *exegesis* that leads the soul back to its truth (*haqiqat*)—transmutes all cosmic realities and relations and restores them to symbols; each becomes an Event of the soul, which, in its ascent, its *Mi'raj*, passes beyond them and makes them interior to itself.

Hence, having understood *who*, through the *ta'wil* of the soul, was led back to his origin, and *to whom* he was there led back, the text of our recitals being the track of this exegesis or this exodus of the soul, we can understand *what* the *ta'wil* or exegesis of our texts is to bring back to its source and, by so doing, *to what*—that is, to what source—the exegesis brings back the text. This exegesis will succeed or fail in accordance with whether or not one succeeds in leading the text back to the Event with which it symbolizes. In so doing, the *ta'wil* of the symbols will but reproduce, will itself also re-cite, the *ta'wil* of the soul; this is why we said that the hermeneutic circle closes on itself. Thus we shall understand the symbols of the Spring of Life, of the heavenly and earthly Occident, of the sun rising in the Orient, in the clime of the soul, etc. It is a new situation of man in the cosmos that is valorized by these symbols; it is this personal and concrete situation that the commentators miss when they devalorize the symbols of it into simple substitutes for logical or cosmological data valid for any situation in general.

This eminently personal aspect of our recitals and the personal event that they signify needed to be emphasized at this point, even before any attempt to analyze the data they contain and to relate them to the cosmological system. For if the recitals are considered as impersonal data—that is, are considered only with the person eliminated—their primary and original meaning is inevitably missed. It is thus, for example, that the *ta'wil* that, under the figure of the Active Intelligence, reveals that of the Archangel Gabriel or the Holy Spirit, could be considered a rationalization, a reduction of spirit to intellect. Now, to us, the mental operation in this case appears to signify precisely the opposite: it is the intellect that is taken back to its source, to the reality of the Angel-Spirit. The operation presupposes wakening to consciousness of Self as of a transcendent form, but also as an awakening to the presence of a person to whom, doubtless, many names can be given. It is indeed this consciousness that permits the per-

## The Cycle of Recitals or the Journey into the Orient

ception of beings and things in their person—that is, as thought by a person—just as each Angel thinks its heaven and each heaven is the thought of an Angel, symbolizes with him. This, in the last analysis, was the great aspiration of the philosophy of Ishraq as *Oriental philosophy*: to perceive things, to encounter things, in their "Orient." Here the *cognitio matutina* is not only a contemplation of eternal Ideas; it is encountering Archangels of Light. It is this aspiration that leads to the constitution, as an intermediary universe having its own existence, of this world of symbol or of archetypal Images (*'alam al-mithal*), whose description and motivation absorbed so many of the meditations of our *'urafa'*. It is called the *intermediate Orient* (*al-mashriq al-awsat*), preceding the pure Orient of the archangelic pleroma. It is the world of the Imaginable, that of the Angels-Souls who move the heavens and who are endowed not with sensible organs but with pure active Imagination. As a universe "in which spirits are corporealized and bodies spiritualized," it is pre-eminently the universe of the *ta'wil*, the "place" of our visionary recitals. As such, the latter already mark a rupture of level with the plane on which theoretical philosophy is elaborated. From henceforth the soul is committed to the road to the *Orient*; the cycle of recitals will "recount" the phases of this *exodus*, of this "journey into the Orient."

### 4. *The Cycle of Recitals or the Journey into the Orient*

The motif of the "journey into the Orient" is unmistakably evident in the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*; indeed, it is in relation to it that the trilogy of recitals can be arranged in a cycle. Hayy ibn Yaqzan has *oriented* his disciple; ~~sæ~~ he has shown him *where* the Orient is and *where* the Occident; he has taught him visit modality of being "spatialized" these directions, thereby situating the disciple himself in an intermediate region. The *Orient* cannot be reached until after the expiration of a certain term, which alone will make possible the Stranger's exodus toward his native country of Light. At least, it is even now possible for him to approach it, to lead his life as a pilgrim in quest of this Orient. "Otherwise, the final invitation would be in vain: "If thou wilt, follow me." Now, it *is* this invitation that transmutes the process elsewhere known as "theory of knowledge" into a pilgrimage into the Orient. Just as, in order to be perceived as stages on this pilgrimage, the stages of the cosmos must be perceived not only through sensible representations but also through the symbolic Image



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

that the soul projects of itself, even so the elaborate theory of the effusion of Forms by the Active Intelligence upon the "possible intellect" that makes itself fit to receive them is transmuted into a personal relation that is a rupture with the simply theoretical order. For the adept "journeying in company with the Angel" is in a wholly different *situation* from the philosopher perfecting a theory of knowledge.

Yet it is this very philosopher who is here the adept in person; it is indeed he whom Hayy ibn Yaqzan invites on the journey into the Orient, and the *Recital of the Bird* will bear witness that he has entered upon it, that he is walking in-company with the Angel—that is, "in company with the King's Messenger." But can a philosopher who truly practices his philosophy as a pilgrimage into the Orient produce anything other than an *Oriental philosophy*? We should be happy if we could answer this question only by meditating upon Avicenna's recitals and those in which Suhrawardi continued them with an abundance of dramatic vicissitudes. Unfortunately, as soon as we refer to an "Oriental philosophy" in connection with Avicenna, we hear the echo of controversies developed around hypotheses that Hayy ibn Yaqzan's simple gesture could have sufficed to render superfluous, if anyone had troubled really to look at what his gesture indicates.

In the last analysis, the question would come down to this: what is it that *here* justifies the qualification "Oriental" bestowed on this philosophy or these philosophers? Is it the object of this philosophy? its *orientation* toward an *Orient* of which we must then seek the concept in this philosophy itself? In that case, Hayy ibn Yaqzan tells us more than enough. The Orient that he reveals to the adept is beyond any doubt the horizon of the Oriental wisdom (*hikmat mash-riqiya*); it is upon the condition of practicing this "Oriental philosophy" that the philosopher, who, perforce of his earthly human condition, is an "Occidental," becomes an "Oriental philosopher." The qualification *Oriental* comes to the philosopher as a transcendent qualification, in the measure to which he is oriented toward the Orient in the *true* sense. This transcendent signification of the Orient, the transmutation of geographical meaning into the symbol of a higher reality, has illustrious precedents. The example is already set in the literature of Gnosticism, and above all in the admirable "Hymn of the Soul" in the *Acts of Thomas* (whose entire dramaturgy is imitated in Suhrawardi's *Recital of Occidental Exile*). It will be referred to again later (below, § 13). Or, on the other hand, is the philosopher to be an "Oriental" in a purely positive, geographical, and administrative sense, corresponding to the civil status that, in our day, appears on passports? Aside from the fact that it still remains un-

## The Cycle of Recitals or the Journey into the Orient

decided *who*, in this case, the Orientals of Avicenna's "Oriental philosophy" were, it may well be that, in our day, philosophers or historians who decide in favor of the one or the other of these answers decide their own "orientation"—or, rather, decide because of their orientation. In this case, the controversies will have failed of their real object.

The dispute over the qualification "Oriental" also implies the definition of a relationship between persons. How, that is, are we to define the relationship between Avicenna and Suhrawardi? Opposition? continuity? amplification? The two volumes of Suhrawardi's philosophical and mystical works that I have so far been able to publish gave me occasion to analyze the implications of the philosopher's own concept of the Orient and of the Oriental wisdom, and, inevitably, to sketch the polemics that have arisen around that concept. I can only refer to them here,<sup>38</sup> as I do not think anything is to be gained by repeating the details and as I have no particular inclination for polemics and hypotheses. The latter give rather the impression that they continually move the same pawns on the same chessboard, or that they remain fascinated by a gesture, instead of following the direction of the gesture and candidly looking at what it indicates.

The point of departure was a celebrated article by Nallino—for a time it was next door to becoming an article of faith—from which it appeared that there was nothing in common between the philosophical statements of Avicenna and those of Suhrawardi. Certainly, Avicenna had conceived something in the way of an "Oriental philosophy," but we were assured that his abortive project contained nothing that was not highly reasonable and rational and, all in all, little different from the work that he actually brought to completion. As for Suhrawardi, he must remain responsible for the philosophy of illumination (*ishraq*), with its "extravagances" in the Neoplatonic manner of Iamblichus and Proclus. Sensible people might therefore be reassured; a projected "Oriental philosophy" did not necessarily imply an irrational adventure. The trouble with this eminently sensible explanation was that Suhrawardi, and with him his entire spiritual posterity, had conceived their own philosophy as "Oriental philosophy," and that the terms *ishraqi* and *mashraqi* to them represented interchangeable notions.<sup>39</sup> Hence the question had to be posed in terms quite different from

38. Cf. our "Prolegomenes I," pp. xxv-lxii, on the Oriental knowledge, the Oriental philosophy, and the Oriental tradition; "Prolegomenes II," pp. 5-19. in *CEuvres philosophiques*.

39. The reader may convince himself of this from the passages referred to in the index to our edition of the *Hikmat al-Ishraq*.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

Nallino's. Before embarking on our hypotheses, it would be best to question Suhrawardi himself concerning his own concept of "Oriental philosophy" and the way in which he conceived his relation to Avicenna, and to search the latter's work to see if it did not contain something that might have launched Suhrawardi's project.

Suhrawardi's representation of Ishraq moves in a circle. *Illuminative wisdom* (*ishraqi*) is neither in any opposition to Oriental wisdom [*mashriqi*] nor even distinguished from it: such a divine wisdom or *theosophia* is illuminative *because* Oriental, and Oriental *because* illuminative. The rising dawn is the substance of the Orient [*ishraq, shuruq, mashriq*]. The Orient is the eternal dawn of the archangelic Lights of the pleroma; it is the dawns of the lights that they flash upon the soul that they draw to themselves. In these dawns rises the *cognitio matutina*, which is an *Oriental* knowing because it is the *Orient* of all knowing. Hence the qualification "Oriental" is motivated and justified first of all only by reason of its transcendent source, or rather because the Orient *is* that transcendent source, and the qualification that it motivates and confers has first of all a transcendent signification. This is not to say that it has not had its particular correspondence on earth in a family of Sages with definite geographical connections—for such, in fact, was pre-eminently the case with the ancient Sages of Persia. Nevertheless, their Oriental quality arises above all from the fact that they were guided, oriented, by those Lights, and that they were *Muta-allihan*, theosophianic Sages with the experience of *theosis*. Their family, then, also comprises the whole branch of Hermeticists. Ibn Wahshiya connected the Ishraqiyun with a class of Egyptian priests called "children of the sister of Hermes."<sup>40</sup> The figure of Hermes appears several times, as the archetype of the mystic, in Suhrawardi's works.

Hence we have now learned something that should never be forgotten: we must no longer speak of "Oriental Sages" except in terms of an "Oriental wisdom" [*hikmat mashriqla*]; it is the latter that confers their denominative of origin on these philosophers; it is not enough to be Oriental in the geographical and political sense of the word in order, *eo ipso*, to pursue an "Oriental philosophy." There is here perhaps a relationship that we must bear in mind if we would discern the intention of an "Oriental wisdom" in Avicenna. Mr. Badawi has recently proposed an ingenious explanation of the "Orientals"

40. Ibn Wahshiya, *Ancient Alphabets and Hieroglyphic Characters*, ed. J. von Hammer-Purgstall, p. 100 of the Arabic text.

## The Cycle of Recitals or the Journey into the Orient

who appear in the surviving fragments of the *Kitab al-Insaf*;<sup>41</sup> they are after all, he suggests, only the Peripatetics of Baghdad; their lack of skill in philosophy is even brought out with humor. In that case they could hardly be the Orientals of the "Oriental wisdom" mentioned no less than six times in the most characteristic passages of the commentary that Avicenna wrote in the margin of the so-called *Theology* of Aristotle.<sup>42</sup> These Orientals can be sought even farther east of Baghdad. Still proceeding eastward, we shall end by coming upon the *khosrovani* Sages of Suhrawardi. But even that, by itself, does not yet mean that we have found the Orient that qualifies these Sages as "Oriental." As to searching for "Orientals" whose "Oriental wisdom" should owe its quality purely and simply to their geographical situation—to do so is perhaps to chase after phantoms of our own erudition.

Recollection and use of the terms *hikmat ishraqiya* and *mashriqiya* remain current and alive down to Sadra Shirazi (d. 1640) and Hadi Sabzavari (d. 1878). It does not appear that anyone in the Iranian tradition ever thought of a distinction resembling the one made by Nallino. It is true that Avicenna's '*erfan*' has always been taken seriously by that tradition, and that no one belonging to it has ever doubted that the author of the last section of the *Is'harat* and of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* was an '*arif*', a mystic-gnostic. What has been doubted is the fidelity of these "Orientals" to Islam, and it is this that distinguishes them from orthodox Sufism.<sup>43</sup> Anyone who wishes to refuse this quality of '*arif*' to Avicenna must carefully define the limits that he imposes on the word "mystic," nor would it be beyond the bounds of possibility that here too those limits would prove to have their basis in a spiritual *orientation* that was peculiarly "Occidental."

It is under this perspective that we may attempt to understand the relation

41. Cf. 'Abdurrahman Badawi, '*inda'l-'Arab*, I, introd., pp. 24 ff.

42. Cf. Georges Vajda, "Les Notes d'Avicenne sur la Theologie d'Aristote," p. 348.

43. It is thus that an old tradition, which Reza Quli Khan (Hedayat) echoes, divides the Spirituals into two comprehensive categories: the *speculatives* (*ahl-e nazar*) and the *practitioners* of spiritual experience (*ahl-e riyadat*). The former, if they follow the religion of Islam, are the *Mutakallimun* in general; if they do not, they are the philos-

ophers known as Peripatetics (*Mashsha'un*). Similarly, those among the latter who keep the Law of the Prophet of Islam are called *Sufis*, while those who do not adhere to the Law of the Prophet are the philosophers known as *Ishraqiyun*—that is, the adepts of Suhrawardi's "Oriental theosophy." Cf. Reza Quli Khan, *Riyad al-'arif in* (in Persian), p. 18. This tradition is eloquent (it is also represented in San'allah Wali), although the classification is perhaps too categorical in respect to the spiritual life of Iran (cf. also above, pp. 6 and 14).

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

between Avicenna and Suhrawardi and to ask if the journey into the Orient may not require the aid of them both. Does not the very idea of this journey originate, with our philosophers, in the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*? Its still inaccessible goal is the Orient of the archangelic pleroma; to this pleroma belongs our Active Intelligence, Holy Spirit, or Angel Gabriel. Avicenna's explanation of knowledge, which makes it arise not from an abstractive operation of the human intellect but from an illumination of the Active Intelligence irradiating a Form on the "possible intellect"—does not this already, *eo ipso*, make knowledge an "Oriental" process? Does not this very fact contain an indication, which an "Oriental philosophy" must take as its guide and explore further? The famous *Notebooks* that contained what had survived of Avicenna's "Oriental" project were available to Suhrawardi; he could read them and record his astonishment at finding nothing specifically "Oriental" in them.<sup>44</sup> We too in our turn can read them today, under the title *Logic of the Orientals*, and feel the same astonishment, tempered by the fact that the Logic by which the *Hikmat al-Ishraq* is prefaced would, if detached from the rest of the book, exhibit nothing specifically Oriental except the theses expressly put forth as Ishraqi.

The reproach that Suhrawardi addresses to Avicenna, the reasons that he discovers in these incomplete *Notebooks* for the failure of the Oriental project, come down to this: Avicenna had not known the *true* Oriental *spring* of philosophy. Certainly, this implies that he did not find—or, having found, did not recognize—the track of the ancient Iranian philosophers. But the matter is not one of a mere national lineage, but of a sacral origin. The origin of the Oriental wisdom of the Orientals is stated for us in the *Hikmat al-Ishraq*: it is the Springs of the Light 'of Glory and of the Sovereignty of Light (*yanabi' al-Khurrah wa'l-Rai*). The philosophy of Ishraq is in the last analysis a philosophy of the *Xvarnah*, of the celestial lambence of the sacral light of Zoroastrianism.<sup>45</sup> Hence Suhrawardi could say that anyone in search of the "Oriental philosophy" must look in Suhrawardi's own work, for which he had had no predecessor. Does this suffice to break the connection, to define the relation between Suhrawardi and Avicenna as merely negative? Not at all, for the connections proclaim themselves elsewhere.

44. We shall not here return to the fact that Suhrawardi perfectly distinguished between the *Notebooks* and the *Kitab al-Insaf*; cf. our "Prolegomenes II," pp. 17 ff.

45. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 34 ff. and p. 56, n.

121 a. This notion occurs in Avicenna. Cf. Mo'in's edition of the *Ilahiyat* from the *Danesh-Namah-e 'Ala'i*, p. 129, n. 2, where the use of the word *varj* as equivalent to *xvarnah* is recorded and commented on.

## The Cycle of Recitals or the Journey into the Orient

The road by which we were led to study the visionary recital in Avicenna had its point of departure in study of the Suhrawardian recitals. Having begun by studying the mystical recitals of Suhrawardi, we soon found ourselves faced by an inescapable question: what proportion of Avicennan inspiration was to be found—or, indeed, was explicitly attested—in the cycle of Suhrawardian recitals? As a result, our investigation was obliged to confront the theosophy of Ishraq, the doctrine of the Orient of Lights, together with Avicenna's proposed undertaking of an "Oriental philosophy," or "Oriental wisdom," of which only traces, allusions, or references have come down to us. The latter consist chiefly in the mention that occurs in the prologue to the *Shifa*, in the allusion at the beginning of the work published as *Logic of the Orientals*, and to a greater extent in the references contained in the glosses to the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*;<sup>46</sup> here the themes evoked by these references are especially edifying if they are compared with Suhrawardi's Ishraq. Finally, the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* gives as clear an answer as could be wished to the question of what meaning lay for Avicenna in the concept "Orient," an Orient, certainly, that can no longer be sought in our geographical or political atlases.

This same recital enables us—far better than could the agreements and divergencies discoverable in the great theoretical treatises—to, ascertain if there is a positive relationship between the two masters: it is from the conclusion of this recital that, by his own admission, Suhrawardi let his imagination take wing to compose his beautiful *Recital of Occidental Exile*.<sup>47</sup> Certainly, the tone of the one and the other master differs, as does the dominant of their respective works. But in this recital we have a moment of capital importance in the history of the Iranian spirit, which simultaneously tends to a form so much its own and expresses an experience so essential that at a single stroke it meets and matches the symbols elsewhere configured for the same experience of the soul.<sup>48</sup> These agreements teach us that, in the last analysis, the respective situations of the works, and the relations between the philosophical situations that the works reveal and interpret, are to be deciphered not by a mere comparison of their rational statements but through their allusions to an experience

46. Cf. above, n. 42.

47. Cf. our "Prolegomenes II," pp. 85ff.: below, ch. in, § 11; pp. 374-77, nn. 1-2. On the Suhrawardian recital, cf. our

"Le Recit d'initiation et l'hermetisme en Iran."

48. Our notes to Part II point out some of these convergences of interest for the phenomenology of symbols.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

that transcends those statements and to which these visionary recitals are so many personal testimonies.

The experience common to these recitals puts us on the very road to understanding the psychic process of this experience as an exemplification of *ta'wil*, which makes it not only exegesis of a text but exegesis of the soul. It is the *text* of the recital that here results from this exegesis. And both *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* and the *Recital of Occidental Exile* will show us in this *exegesis* an *exodus* that transcends the physical cosmos, that interiorizes its schema. Our exegesis in turn cannot recover the text except by tracing in it the experience in which it originates and which has transformed into symbols the data of physics, psychology, and cosmology. It is no matter of chance that the work of the one and the other master exhibits this common trait—that, side by side with extremely substantial systematic treatises, the two canons include a cycle of recitals of inner initiation marking a rupture of level with the plane on which the patencies successively acquired by theoretical expositions are linked together. Finally, Suhrawardi's personal position—his admiration, his reservations, his reticences—is expressed with perfect frankness and clarity in the prologue to his *Recital of Occidental Exile*, which we believe may profitably be quoted here.<sup>49</sup>

"When I became acquainted," he writes, "with the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, in spite of the admirable spiritual sentences and the profound suggestions that it contains, I found it lacking in illuminations displaying the supreme experience—that is, the Great Overwhelming (Koran LXXIX : 34)—that is kept in the treasury of the Divine Books, deposited in the symbols of the Sages, hidden in the *Recital of Salaman and Absal* composed by the narrator of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. It is the mystery upon which the stations of the Sufis and of the masters of mental vision are established. There is no reference to it in the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* except at the end of the book, where it is said: it sometimes happens that the Solitaries among men emigrate toward Him, etc. Then in my turn I wished to relate something thereof, in the form of a recital that I have entitled the *Recital of Occidental Exile*, for some of our noble brothers."

This prologue to the *Recital of Occidental Exile* requires no commentary. Suhrawardi, while affirming his admiration, states, no less clearly than he did in regard to the famous *Notebooks*, what he did not find in Avicenna's recital.

49. Cf. our "Prolegomenes II," p. 88.

## The Cycle of Recitals or the Journey into the Orient

**But** there is a difference in the evaluation here; for the end of Avicenna's recital does, in its turn, show a trace of the Great Overwhelming, of the great departure to which the Expatriate aspires. It is the short passage that occurs in ch. 24 of our edition and translation of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. Here, then, Suhrawardi could find his point of departure, could in his turn and for his own part give an account of the journey into the Orient. For anyone who wishes to arrive at a concrete representation of the positive relationship between Avicenna and Suhrawardi, perhaps no better exercise in meditation **could** be advised than that he read the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* and the *Recital of Occidental Exile* in succession.<sup>50</sup> At the end of Avicenna's recital, the Angel of whom Hayy ibn Yaqzan is the individuation pronounces the following invitation: "If thou wilt, follow me toward Him." At the beginning of the *Recital of Occidental Exile*, the hoopoe brings the exile, his *brother*, a message from their "father"—that is, from the Intelligence or Holy Spirit from which human souls emanate: "Take the road. Delay not your departure." And in fact **the** journey begins, and leads the pilgrim to the mystical Sinai, to the summit of the cosmic mountain. It would be difficult to figure in a better symbol the term that is at once the starting point and the outcome of the "Oriental philosophy"—that is, the philosophy *oriented* upon that Orient toward which the pilgrim of the Avicennan and of the Suhrawardian recital directs his way.

It is the destiny of this pilgrim that confirms for us the order in which the trilogy of Avicennan recitals is to be read. Let us return to the final phase of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, the Angel's invitation. The recital ends with this invitation and leaves us in suspense. Suhrawardi's *Recital of Occidental Exile* will have its parallel in the Avicennan cycle in the *Recital of the Bird*, and it is no matter of chance that Suhrawardi translated the latter into Persian. Like the pilgrim of the mystical Sinai, the Bird that has reached the end of the pilgrimage for an instant is not finally delivered; the experience of the recital, the exegesis of the soul, was still only an ecstatic anticipation of the final ecstasy. But henceforth the Bird journeys "in company with the King's Messenger." Thus Hayy ibn Yaqzan's initiatory intent—traveling in company with the Angel—is realized.

It is to be noted that in the course of the rapt discourse in dialogue the role of the Active Intelligence (*'aql fa"al*) becomes "deintellectualized" in favor

50. We shall publish translations of Recital of *Occidental Exile* and of all mystical recitals in a forthcoming volume in the series "Documents spirituels" (published by Cahiers du Sud).



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

of a concrete individuation of its experienced and conscious relationship to the human soul. Its function is no longer only that described by the theory of knowledge, or, rather, that function is transmuted into an *angelic pedagogy*, the idea of which gradually asserts itself and which establishes an intimate connection between the meaning of the angelology and the mystical experience. It is for this reason that we should like to thematize the experience of our recitals by connecting it with the two figures of Tobias and the Angel, whose story then assumes the value of an archetype and whose full meaning is attained only if we thus elevate it to the mystical plane. The epiphany of the Angel corresponds to a certain moment and degree in the individuation of the soul, when, awakened to its consciousness of being a stranger, it becomes free from this world and knows that it forms one with its celestial counterpart, the person of the Angel from whom it originates. And indeed the statute of this integration and dual integrality is proclaimed in ch. 25 of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*: the soul cannot emerge from this cosmos without its Guide, and, reciprocally, the Guide needs the soul in order to perform and celebrate his divine service. Tobias and the Angel are here committed to the destiny of one and the same pilgrimage.

Their thematization thus determined, the recitals display a perfect coherence if they are meditated upon in the following order:

(1) The *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* is the initiation into the Orient—that is, into the world of pure Forms, archangelic Forms of Light opposed to the Occident of the terrestrial world and the farthest Occident of pure Matter. It reveals the Angel *Dator formarum* in the person of the *pir-youth*, Hayy ibn Yaqzan, whose mysterious name signifies "Living, son of Vigilant," or perhaps better "Watcher" (the name of the angels in the books of Enoch). It describes a cosmos whose physical data are transmuted into symbols, and it invites the adept to become the companion of the Angel, to *undertake*, through this universe of symbols, the mystical journey into the Orient. The answer to this "vocation" remains in suspense.

(2) The *Recital of the Bird*, after a touching prelude, presents the answer to this invitation. The soul, the captive and stranger, has awakened to itself. In the ecstasy of a mental ascent, it makes its way across the valleys and ranges of the cosmic mountain (Mount Qaf). To this recital we may add the *Mi'raj-Namah* (Book of the Celestial Ascension), whose attribution to Avicenna is certainly erroneous but which prefigures the Bird's itinerary. The Bird reaches the end of the pilgrimage into the Orient, but its liberation is

## The Cycle of Recitals or the Journey into the Orient

not final. The soul must *return* from this "Oriental" ecstasy, but henceforth it walks "in company with the King's Messenger"—that is, in company with the Angel.

(3) The *Recital of Salaman and Absal*, in its Avicennan version, typifies in these two figures the pair of terrestrial angels mentioned in ch. 21 of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. Defining the virtual angelicity of the human soul, and thereby its true nature and vocation, this pair is made up of the two intellectual powers of the soul (the speculative and the practical), and symbolizes *with* a tutelary angelic pair, which itself is connected with the Koranic angelology. Thus the structure of the soul in itself reflects the structure that orders the pleroma in dyads or pairs of Archangels-Kerubim and of Angels-Souls who move the celestial spheres. Avicenna's *Recital of Salaman and Absal* has come down to us only in the form of the rather pallid summary given by Nasiraddin Tusi in his commentary on the *Isharat*. This time the recital is no longer in the first person, as indeed it could not be—for Absal, who represents "thy rank in mystical gnosis," *dies*, and his mystical death is a prefiguration and an anticipation of the final ecstasy, of the journey into the Orient *without return*. This is why Suhrawardi could indicate his evaluation by saying that the great mystical secret, the Great Overwhelming, was also concealed in the *Recital of Salaman and Absal*.

A long book could be written commenting on this trilogy;<sup>61</sup> here we shall have to confine ourselves to no more than a sketch. First, certain essential Avicennan data must be briefly presented, in order to situate the notion of angelic pedagogy and the symbols of the journey into the Orient, of the quest that all Spirituals have undertaken. We shall then offer translations of each of the recitals, with the minimum of commentaries requisite for an understanding of each of the "moments" of the cycle.

51. We regret that, having been unable to obtain a microfilm in time, we cannot here discuss a short epistle entitled *al-Mabda' wa'l-Ma'ad* (not to be confused with two other *risala* bearing the same title), listed in G. C. Anawati, *Essai de bibliographie avicennienne*, pp. 254-55, No. 197. Its beginning resembles that of our Avicennan and Suhrawardian recitals, as well as the "Hymn

of the Soul" in the *Acts of Thomas*, to be discussed later (§ 13). "Know that long ago I was in my country, the abode of my parents and my forefathers. It befell that the master of the country sent for me and said: It befits thee not that thou shouldst remain abiding in my country. . . ." We hope that we may find occasion to return to this epistle, with its promising beginning.

## II AVICENNISM AND ANGELOLOGY

### 5. *The Angel, Spirit and Intelligence*

The idea of the journey into the Orient—that is, of the soul's return to its "home" under the conduct of its Guide, its celestial Self—implies an "angelic pedagogy" that makes the being of the particular soul and the notion of soul in general concurrent with an angelology. This concurrence is particularly clear in the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, in which the Avicennan angelology propounds its triple hierarchy: there are the Archangels or pure Intelligences, the *Kerubim* (Cherubs). There are the Angels who emanate from them and who are the moving Souls of the celestial spheres. There are the human souls, or "terrestrial angels," who move and govern earthly human bodies. We shall be insistently reminded of the kinship and homology between *Animae coelestes* and *animae humanae*. Human souls are in the same relation to the Angel from whom they emanate and who is the tenth of the *Kerubim* as is each celestial Soul to the Intelligence from whose thought its being is an emanation. Hence it is in imitation of the *Anima coelestis* that the terrestrial angel or *anima humana* will realize its angelicity (*fereshtagi*), which is still virtual precisely because terrestrial. But, unlike the *Anima coelestis*, the human soul can be false to its being, transgress its limits, and develop the demonic virtuality in itself.

Our notes to Part II point out some of the aspects implicit in this doctrine. It is still too soon to attempt a synthesis here. We shall merely state some characteristics of the Avicennan angelology—in particular, how the notion of *soul* plays an essential role in it, since it is because of this notion that the

## The Angel, Spirit and Intelligence

cosmological function of the Angel-Intelligence also appears as a soteriology. This latter, in turn, is the consummation of the angelic pedagogy, which finally poses the problem: if our souls are in the same relation to the Active Intelligence (Holy Spirit or Archangel Gabriel) as is each *Anima coelestis* to its Archangel, the fact nevertheless remains that each Intelligence ('*aql*) forms with each Soul (*nafs*) a dyadic whole, a closed universe, a heaven among the heavens, whereas human souls are a multitude in relation to one and the same Intelligence. How is the homology of structure and behavior to be conceived? The answer to this problem will be less a theoretical solution than a vision—that of Hayy ibn Yaqzan, for example—from which a fundamental problem of angelology will make its appearance under a new aspect: the problem of specific individuality—that is, of the individuality that is no longer subordinated to a species but is itself its species, its archetype.

In establishing its own angelology, and with it all the aspects foreshadowed by the gnostic feeling of Exile and the ardent desire that is its motive force, Avicennism must have had to confront other systems of angelology proceeding from an entirely different *interpretatio mundi*. First of all there will be the Koranic angelology, which a felicitous *ta'wil* will furnish means for leading back to its philosophical truth. There will be the far more serious conflict with the Averroistic angelology. There will be the uneasiness aroused in Christendom by this angelology, which Latin Avicennism will be unable to make current in orthodox and official medieval Scholasticism but whose attested presence enables us to find its connections of kinship and affinity with so many other visions in all ages. Thus it would be necessary to compose a complete *summa* of angelology in order to situate and restore this function of Avicennism. The time for that has not yet come. Here we merely propose a few themes whose meditation will serve to illuminate the trilogy of our recitals.

The celestial kinship of the soul is declared in a simple fact whose implication is twofold: it is by awakening to consciousness of itself, by attaining to consciousness of self, that the soul is enabled to know the Angel and the world of the Angel,<sup>1</sup> and, by thus attaining the "clime of the Angel"—that is, the *Orient*—is *eo ipso* enabled to realize its exodus from the cosmos that is the Occident—that is, to affirm its transcendence in respect to that cosmos. This, then, implies, between the thinking human soul (*nafs natiqa*) and the Angel, a relation that is at least a conaturality (which indeed leaves its mark in the

1. Cf. translation of the commentary on 310-11, 360-61; pp. 357-61, nn. 1-3; p. 366, the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, pp. 284, n. 15, etc.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

twofold intellectual power of the soul thus structured after the image of the dyad '*aql-nafs*'). And it likewise implies a transcendence common to the soul and the Angel in respect to cosmic space. It is by acquiring consciousness of this transcendence that the soul is delivered from this cosmos. To be sure, it is the sense of spatiality pertaining to the cosmic crypt that we must have in mind here; transcendence in respect to sensible space does not imply evanescence into the *formless* or the unfigurable. Pure *Forms* have an intelligible "space" of their own.

These are already premises that were sure to put our philosophers in difficulties with Islamic orthodoxy. Not with the text of the Koranic revelation as such; on the contrary, that revelation has supplied inexhaustible data to the flexible *ta'wil* of all the theosophies (that of Ibn 'Arabi, for example). On the other hand, angelology is the second of the five Islamic articles of faith (Divine Unity, Angels, Messengers, Revealed Books, Day of Resurrection), and from this point of view one could well suppose that the situation of our philosophers would be easier in Islam than in Christendom. In fact, their concept of the angel and of angelology had as its minimum consequence a decentralization of the monotheistic universe, and it was inevitable that in Islam as in Christendom this provoked on the orthodox side a reaction varying in intensity from incomprehension and alarm to the most open hostility. It was the Arabic root '*aql*' that was called upon to provide translations for the meanings intellect or intelligence (as substance, *Nous*) and intellection (as act, *noesis*). In addition, the act of thought thus designated was described as generator of being and substance", from Intelligence to Intelligence, down to that Tenth Intelligence which is our Active Intelligence, the originator of our souls. Then too, the spiritual nature of these angelic entities required a pneumatology affirming the immateriality of the Spirit, of the *Ruh*, and its transcendence in respect to cosmic space. Now, this doctrine, despite its acceptance by the theologian al-Ghazzali, could not win recognition from official orthodoxy. Noology and pneumatology were to situate and constitute the angelology of our philosophers in contrast to that of orthodoxy.

The equivalence between the pleroma of the Intelligences (*'Uqul*) and the archangelic pleroma (Arabic *Mala'ika*, Persian *Fereshtagan*) forms part of our philosophers' creed. It would be worth while to trace this convergence from the time of late Greek Neoplatonism; Avicennism is, without a doubt, a moment of capital importance in it, and it is presupposed by the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* as well as by the Persian commentator's amplifications.

## The Angel, Spirit and Intelligence

Every occasion for recalling it is seized upon, and it would be superfluous to multiply citations here.<sup>2</sup> However, if it occurs to the philosopher to reflect on the term '*aql*' designating the Angel-Intelligence, he will not fail to make some surprising observations in regard to the implications of this word, intended to represent in Arabic the Greek term *Nous*, the corresponding Latin term for which will be *intellectus* or *intelligentia* (not *ratio*). In Persian the situation is entirely different. The corresponding term, *kharad*, directly evokes representations relative to knowledge and immaterial substantiality (e.g., the title of the Pahlavi book *Menoke Xrat*: Celestial Wisdom).<sup>3</sup> In addition it is the equivalent mentioned by the Persian commentator on *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*: for example, '*aql nazari* (*intellectus contemplans, speculativus*) has as its equivalent *kharad-e dana*. With the representation called up by the Persian term simultaneously in mind, one certainly has less difficulty in conceiving, under the Arabic term '*aql*', the substantiality of the angelic being.

In any case, it is of this difficulty that the subtle and original philosopher Abu'l-Barakat<sup>4</sup> was aware. He observes that what is designated in Arabic by '*aql*' would more properly correspond to '*aql 'amali* (*intellectus practicus*, Persian *kharad-e kar-kun*), in reference to the primary sense of the root, which is "prevent," "hinder," "hobble," "bind."<sup>5</sup> One says, for example: "I have hobbled [*'aqaltu*]the camel"—that is, I have thus prevented it from wandering at will; similarly '*aql 'amali* "hobbles" the soul and prevents it from wandering as it pleases. The explanation is not too satisfactory, for what the Greeks meant was a concept and a meaning embracing both speculative knowledge (*'ilm nazari*) and practical judgment. Now, Abu'l-Barakat observes, there was no **one** word in Arabic to connote these two meanings simultaneously. Nothing

2. Among many others, cf. the following passage from the epistle in reply to the questions posed by Ibn Abi'l-Khayr (University of Istanbul, arabca yazma 1458, 54b): "Thumma ma'rifatu'l-jawahiri 'th-thabitati'l-mufariqati mina'l-Mawaddi wa-hiya'l-mala'ikatu'l-muqarribuna'l-musammStu 'inda'l-hukama'i 'al-'uqulu'l-fa"ala-tu.' "

3. The Persian word *kharad* is thus equivalent to *Nous* and to *Sophia*. In the Ishraqi Parsiism set forth in the *Dabestan*, the Angels-Intelligences are called Serosh (Sorush), corresponding in the Avesta to

the proper name of the Angel Sraosha, traditionally identified with the Angel Gabriel. The identification of the latter with the Active Intelligence could be the explanation for this Parsi terminology; cf. p. 369, n. 21 (where we cite the importance of the *spiritual fact* that Zoroastrians of the sixteenth century found their own again in the philosophy of Ishraq).

4. On this interesting philosophical figure (d. 547/1152), cf. S. Pines, *Beitrage zur islamischen Atomenlehre*, pp. 82 ff.

5. Cf. Abu'l-Barakat, *al-Kitab al-Mu'tabar*, II ("Metaphysics"), 409.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

was left but to transpose, by recourse to a term that referred to at least one of these meanings. But in fact, he concludes, the Arabic equivalent of the representation to be transposed would have been the word *Ilah*, God, whence the book of Aristotle—that is, the metaphysical part of his philosophy—regularly designated in Arabic by the name *Ilahiyat*, that is, *Divinalia*.<sup>6</sup> Whatever the inadequacy of the word *'aql* to designate the Intelligences, what had to be found, and what in fact was found, was the representation of the *Dii-Angeli* of Proclus. Term and concept of *Mala'ika* (Angels), then, offered themselves spontaneously as precise correspondences, not as a harmonization, artificially sought *post factum*, with the data of the Koran; it was rather these data that the *ta'wil*, the *exegesis*, was to bring back to the full truth of the Angel, of which the Koranic aspect was only the exoteric aspect.

Naturally, literalist orthodoxy could not resign itself to this *ta'wil*. Shi'ite Gnosticism was to be perfectly content with it; but, in contrast, if we wish to see how exoteric theologians reacted to it, we need only consult Majlisi's voluminous encyclopedia.<sup>7</sup> The existence of Angels, we there read, is admitted by all Imamites, or rather by all "Mussulmans" except by those who profess philosophy and have introduced themselves among Mussulmans only to destroy the principles and dogmas of Islam.<sup>8</sup> What every pious believer knows from the Koran (xxxv: 1) is that the Angels are *subtle* and *luminous bodies* provided with two, three, four, or more wings. They can assume various forms; they are endowed with perfect knowledge and have power over their acts. Their ministry is to glorify God; they manifest themselves to the Prophets and their spiritual heirs (*wasi*) to signify a divine communication (*wahy*) to them. But to say more of them—to affirm, for example, the transcendence (*tajarrud*) of the Angel, or, through *ta'wil*, to carry back the notion of them to that of the Intelligences and the Souls of the spheres, to the powers of nature or to the human faculties—all that, for the great official Shi'ite doctor [*muhaqqiq thani*], is foolhardiness and straying from the right road. Hence, rather than turning directly to our philosophers or to some disciple of Ibn 'Arabi for a systematic exposition of angelology to be inserted in this passage

6. In his hymn to the Perfect Nature, Suhrawardi also mentions the God of Gods, *Ilahu 'l-Alihati*.

7. For what follows, cf. Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, XIV, 233.

8. From which we can gather that,

about the time of Majlisi, the position of some great philosophers, such as Mir Damad, Sadra Shirazi, Qazi Sa'id Qummi, and their pupils, was scarcely more comfortable than that of their illustrious predecessors.

## The Angel, Spirit and Intelligence

of his encyclopedia, he prefers to go for it to two such authorities as Taftazani and Fakhraddin Razi.

The great interest of this twofold exposition is to show us, in a brief survey, how angelology presented itself to the eyes of the orthodox theologian. Taftazani's exposition distinguishes three conceptions of angelology: there is that of Islamic orthodoxy; there is that of our *falasifa*, dividing the angelic hierarchies into pure Intelligences or Archangels-Cherubs, and Angels-Souls entrusted with the government of a body; finally, there is that of the *Ashab al-Tilimsat*,<sup>9</sup> the theurgic Sages, a designation that can here include the "Sabians" of Harran and the Ishraqiyun theosophers. Their doctrine has the peculiarity that it does not stress the '*aql*', the Angel's organ of self-intellection, which permits the philosophers their angelological deduction of the cosmos, presenting the hierarchy of the heavens as a sort of phenomenology of the angelic consciousness. The theurgic doctrine lays more stress on the *Ruh*: instead of *al-'Aql al-awwal*, it says *al-Ruh al-A'zam*, the Supreme Spirit; it recognizes, for each species, for each category of beings, a governing and protecting Angel. This notion is in harmony with the fundamental notion of Ishraqi Neo-Zoroastrianism, and it finally leads to that of the Perfect Nature.

The exposition drawn from Fakhraddin Razi has the advantage of defining a principle of systematization from the outset. Everyone, Fakhraddin declares, agrees upon the existence of Angels, regarding it as the supereminent prerogative of the world above, and conceiving them as personal essences subsisting of themselves. The divergence arises at the point of determining whether these pure essences occupy space or, on the contrary, cannot be situated in space. Adoption of the first hypothesis makes it possible to group together three systems of angelology: there is that of the majority of Mussulmans; there is that of the astral religion of the Sabians;<sup>10</sup> there is that of the majority of Mazdeans (*majus*) and Manichaeans (*thanawiya*). The dualism of these last is understood as opposing the substance of Light and the substance of Darkness as two principles that, though eternal, are sensible in nature and hence can be situated in space. The substance of Light unceasingly engenders Friends (*awliya*)—that is, Angels—not by way of carnal generation but as light

9. Cf. Paul Kraus, *Jabir ibn Hayyan*, II, 293 (on Balinas = Apollonius of Tyana).

10. In which the Angel is not indistinguishable from the luminous astral mass **but** is the *Soul*, the Form of Light, that

governs the star; cf. our "Rituel sabeen," pp. 188 ff., and Nasir-e Khusraw, *Kitab-e Jami' al-Hikmatayn*, ed. H. Corbin and M. Mo'in, p. 136.



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

engenders light or as wisdom engenders sages. The substance of Darkness unceasingly engenders *adversaries*—that is, demons—as the stupid engender stupidity and vice versa.

No less interesting than this first schema is that which Fakhraddin now attaches to the adoption of the second hypothesis. For the latter, he considers, is common to the *falasifa* and to "certain sects" among the Christians. Now, according to the details given later, these can only be Gnostic sects, and the connection already suggested in respect to the true kinship of our *falasifa* would here, if need be, receive confirmation. For these Gnostics, the Angels are human souls which depart from their bodies in a perfect state of purity, goodness, and beauty, while the demons are those which depart from their bodies ugly and sullied. Angelology and demonology are connected with the human condition, with the statute that defines it as essentially intermediate, as a virtuality of the Angel *or* of the demon. This, furthermore, agrees very well with the anthropology of Ismailian Gnosticism.<sup>11</sup> For the philosophers and the Gnostics, the Angel is no longer localizable in the space of bodies, Razi emphasizes, and there is no rupture of continuity between the being of the Angel *in actu* and that of the human soul as potential angel. Of the two categories of Angels, Intelligences and Souls, the former [*Mala'ikat ruhaniya*, spiritual Angels) stand in the same relation to the latter (*Malaika 'amaliya*, active Angels) as do the latter to our thinking souls. There is here a slight shift in respect to the analogy of the relation of our souls to the Active Intelligence, as that relation is several times reaffirmed in the course of the commentary on *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*; the doctrine taught here is nevertheless extremely useful.

What is important and unmistakably evident in Fakhraddin's exposition is that the conception of the being of the Angel and the conception of the human soul, angelology and psychology, depend upon a doctrine of the Spirit, on a preliminary pneumatology. Without any doubt, this was at a certain moment a central problem of thought in Islam. It appears that not everyone foresaw that the adoption of the hypothesis of the transspatiality and transcendence of the Angel would lead to the promotion of the *Mala'ika* to the divinity of the *Dii-Angeli*; at least Abu'l-Barakat had the candor to recognize that such should properly be the denomination of the Intelligences (*'uqul*).

Certainly we should again remind ourselves that space here is the space

11. Cf. *ibid.*, ch. 11, and our *Etude préliminaire*, pp. 121 ff.; cf. further our "Rituel sabéen," pp. 199 ff., 242 ff.; our "Cyclical Time," pp. 166 ff.

## The Angel, Spirit and Intelligence

enclosed under the cosmic crypt delimited by the Ninth Sphere; the *Imago mundi* is not projected upon an indefinitely extended cosmos. The reservation must be made both because of the representation of the Angel that will remain possible and because of the reasons advanced in favor of this transspatiality. The universe of spiritual entities, of separate pure Forms, is not the universe of the *formless*, of the unfigurable, as might too hastily be supposed by some mystical monist ardently desirous to abolish the particularities of Forms. In the world of spiritual entities distinction and multiplicity subsist (cf. below, p. 54). No doubt it is impossible to describe, except in symbols, the state to which that of pure Form would correspond experientially, since this is "to reach the immaterial beyond matter, to feel the fire that burns beyond what is burned by fire, thus to perceive one's own absolute Form and to be that Form." 12

It was by the necessity for this "beyond . . ." that Suhrawardi, for example, motivated the transspatiality of the Spirit, the *Ruh*. Setting aside the ambiguity of the Arabic word, the master of Ishraq distinguishes on the one hand a vital pneuma, a subtle body that keeps the material body alive, on the other, the thinking soul, "monadic intellective substance" (*'aqliya*), which is the spirit of man (*ruh al-insan*) or, more precisely, the Divine Spirit (*al-Ruh al-ilahi*) in man. Now, this Divine Spirit that is the thinking soul is neither a body, nor corporeal, nor in the world of bodies; there is no difference between it and the Angel, except its present obligation to govern a body. If it were *in* the world—that is, if it were by nature included *in* the space of the cosmic crypt—how would it still be possible to experience those states of ecstasy in which the soul finds itself beyond this world in which it is a stranger, finds itself in the world that is its own—when, as everyone knows, it is absolutely impossible to rupture the pure etheric metal of which the celestial spheres are constituted?<sup>13</sup>

It is significant that it is by appealing to the experiential verification of ecstasy that our shaikh attests the transcendence of the soul, its separation (*tajarrud*) from Matter, as a divine spirit of the same race as the Angels-Spirits and the Angels-Souls. It is because of this transspatiality that the journey into the Orient pointed out by Hayy ibn Yaqzan is possible. To reach the Orient, the "clime of the Angel," is to subject the space of the cosmos to an "involution." But this Orient, the realm of Spirits of Light described in magical terms

12. Cf. G. Quadri, *La Philosophic arabe* (Symbol of Faith of the Philosophers), art. dans *l'Europe medievale*, (French) tr. R. 5, pp. 266-68 of our edition (*Opera metaphysica*, II); cf. translation of the commentary on Hayy ibn Yaqzan, p. 366.

13. Cf. Suhrawardi, *I'tiqid al-Hukama'*

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

by Hayy ibn Yaqzan (ch. 22), is no abyss of pure negativity. The best descriptive commentary on this Orient, on this "abode in heaven, set above the Heaven of Stars," is perhaps the gloss that Avicenna wrote in the margin of a paragraph of the so-called *Theology* of Aristotle, which specifically refers to his *Oriental philosophy*.

The *Theology* sets forth<sup>14</sup> that each of the spiritual entities residing in the heaven above the Heaven of Stars "is in the whole of the sphere of its heaven, yet possesses a particular place, different from that of its companion, in distinction from the corporeal things that are in the heaven, for they (the spiritual entities) are not bodies, nor is that heaven a body." All the difference, then, lies in the word "in," if it expresses the relation of containing between one body and another. To make the angel and the soul, the Divine Spirit, a body, even a subtle and luminous body, as the orthodox doctors of Islam seek to do, is to enclose it forever in the Occident pointed out by Hayy ibn Yaqzan, in the world of exile of Suhrawardi's recital. Nevertheless, not-being-a-body nowise signifies nondistinction of essences; there is multiplicity, but the relations of spiritual space differ from those of the space comprised *under* the Heaven of Stars, no less than the fact of being, as a corporeal thing, *in* that heaven differs from the fact of being "in the whole of the sphere of its heaven." This is why it can be said that "behind this world there is a heaven, an earth, a sea, animals, plants, and men, all of them celestial"; but there every being is celestial, the spiritual entities there correspond to the human beings there, but "no terrestrial thing is there." We seem to be reading a page of Swedenborg; but Swedenborg, it is true, had himself read the *Theology* of Aristotle. Avicenna comments: "It is not true, as some affirm, that there is no multiplicity there above. But this multiplicity must not be understood as if it consisted in parts of essence; it is in the concomitants of essence [*lawazim*] that it consists."<sup>15</sup> . . . There above, then, the form of the heaven and of the world and of what is in the heaven and the world is found under a higher and nobler mode. . . . The forms that are part of the world of Intelligence can be neither discerned nor isolated, although they subsist independently of one another. . . . But (at the same time) all are simultaneous, and each is in every **other**."

14. Cf. Vajda's translation, pp. 381 ff.; ed. Badawi, pp. 58-59.

15. It is in connection with the notion, so decisive here, of these "concomitants" of spiritual entities that Avicenna refers to his

"Oriental wisdom"; hence this is one of the questions properly treated by the latter, and it certainly concerns the state of the world that *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* designates precisely as the "Orient."

## The Angel, Spirit and Intelligence

We regret that we have had to abridge our citation from this extremely important gloss of Avicenna's (so ably translated by Vajda), which for a moment lifts the veil from the content of his *Oriental philosophy* and is at the same time the best preface for, the precise orientation toward, the Orient of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. Because this journey into the Orient presupposes an angelic pedagogy, it was necessary here to recur to some of the premises that situate (and orient) philosophical angelology in respect to the angelology of Islamic orthodoxy. The idea (common to Islam and Christianity) of the Angel as servant of the supreme God and messenger of His communications to the Prophets is replaced by the Neoplatonic idea of the Angel as "hermeneut of the divine silence"—that is, as annunciation and epiphany of the impenetrable and incommunicable divine transcendence. Here angelology and theophany are equivalent, and the ontological status of the Angel is elevated to the pre-eminent degree of the *Dii-Angeli*, as Abu'l-Barakat remarked. We are brought back once again to the still unsolved problem posed by Book xii of the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle—that is, by the plurality of Prime Movers.<sup>16</sup> A single divine *ousia*, to be sure—but plurality of *Dii-Angeli*, of divine "centers" (*each* occupies the whole of its heaven). The result is perhaps a sort of splintering of abstract monotheism; but can the situation be confined within the dilemma monotheism or polytheism? Orthodoxy tended to do so; but, conversely, the angelology of our philosophers tends to destroy the dilemma.

Furthermore, it is this hermeneutic and epiphanic function of the Angel that makes it comprehensible how, by knowing itself, the Soul knows the Angel and the world of the Angel—that is, the world of the Souls and the world of the Active Intelligences. In its act of knowing, it must become conscious of the act of that one among the Active Intelligences who makes the Soul's *intellectus possibilis* become actual (an initiation into this consciousness is what the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* presents). Hence the relation is far from constituting a simple "intellectual" one, in the modern sense of the word. The Angel of Knowledge is in an eminent sense an Angel of Revelation in each act of knowing that he performs in the intellect of the Soul, when the latter has rendered itself fit to receive the irradiation of an intelligible Form. It is impossible to reverse the situation in terms of modern criticism, to say, for example, that the Angel is a creation of our thought. For such a creation would require a condition of possibility, and that would be precisely the act of the *'Aql fa"al* or Angel Holy

16. Cf. A. J. Festugiere, "Les Premiers Moteurs d'Aristote," pp. 66 ff.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

Spirit. It is already the idea of Baader's *Cogitor* that here secures against the idea of *Cogito*. This is why, for the Soul, knowledge of itself is consciousness of the Angel.

More precisely still: in the knowledge of its twofold intellective power, there are revealed to it the homogeneity and homology of its being with the structure of the pleroma that associates each Intelligence and each Soul, '*Aql* and '*Nafs*, in a pair. Precisely here, in the duality of its powers, the human soul can grasp the trajectory and the terminal mystery of the cosmic process. The Tenth Cherub, our Active Intelligence, at the end of this process in which the growing Darkness reached its maximum, no longer had the strength to produce, in his turn, *one* Intelligence, *one* Soul, and *one* heaven. This triadic unity splintered, as it were, into the multitude of our individual souls. Nevertheless, a homology must still be possible, if each human soul stands in the same relation to the Active Intelligence as does each celestial Soul to the Intelligence from which it emanates. Hence the duality of its powers, of which the human soul becomes conscious in knowing itself, reveals to it the structure that ordains it to the world of the Angel. Its own contemplative power stands to the Active Intelligence as each Soul stands to its Angel-Intelligence, and its own active or practical power in turn likewise stands in the same relation to its contemplative power, or as each heaven stands to the Soul that governs its motion. Such is the doctrine that will be stated in ch. 21 of *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* and typified in the figures of Salaman and Absal. It is by acquiring consciousness of the structure of the angelic universe that the *anima humana* learns to behave as a soul *ad imitationem Animae coelestis*. Hence we must now summarize the procession by which the twofold angelic hierarchy comes into being.

### 6. The Archangels-Cherubs or Intelligences

This procession corresponds to the procedure that speculative thought imposes on itself in order to pass from the Unity of the absolute One to the multiplication of being and the multiplicity of beings. The passage is governed by a rigorous principle: *ex uno non provenit nisi unum*.<sup>17</sup> The exoteric idea of Creation is *eo ipso*

17. This is the situation that Nasiraddin Tusi will attempt to overcome by a multidimensional deduction; cf. commentary on the *Isharat*, III, 67-68; Sadra Shirazi

will observe that Tusi's deduction is wholly derived from the doctrine of Suhrawardi; cf. *Sharh al-Hidayah*, pp. 366 ff., and our edition of the *Hikmat al-Ishraq*, § 151, p. 140.

## The Archangels-Cherubs or Intelligences

excluded, in as much as it supposes a voluntary decision, a sort of arbitrary *coup d'etat*, and situates all creatures on the same creatural plane in respect to their Creator. Here it is a question of an eternal establishment, necessitated by the very necessity of the necessary Being. The being thus existentiated is, then, eternally necessitated by the necessary Being, although in itself this existentiated being is only possibility-of-being. To be sure, this pure possibility is only a mode of considering being, since the possible is in fact necessitated to be by the First Being. Nevertheless, since the act of *Thought* itself already participates in *being*, this mode of comprehending being as possibility-of-not-being already declares an element of negativity and darkness; this negativity, which is a self-limitation of being, determines the passage from the absolute Unity of the primordial One to the multiple Unity that is then multiplied in the multitude of unities. This transition itself necessitates a *medium*, an intermediary, which is the First Consequent of the one and necessary Being as Cause. Since the being of this First Consequent includes the necessary and the possible, its unity is no longer pure Unity.<sup>18</sup> Its mediation begins the process that calls into being the plurality of separate substances, each unit of which individually and respectively constitutes its own species—down to the zone of darkness where being is finally exhausted and degraded into the multiplicity that will constitute a multitude of individuals under the same species.<sup>19</sup>

The First Consequent, the First Caused (*al-ma'lul al-awwal*), the primordial Originated (*al-Mubda al-awwal*), is in its being the intellection (*ta'qqul*) that the First Principle has of itself,<sup>20</sup> without need for the innovation of a Form to be utilized as a substrate by the Principle. The First Caused is precisely the Thought eternally thought by the Thought that thinks itself. Louis Gardet rightly remarks that the First Being of Avicenna is not the Thought that does not think (Plotinus), but is this pure Thought that thinks itself and is at once also sovereign Beauty and Goodness and primordial Love.<sup>21</sup> But this Thought, this Intelligence (*'Aql, Nous*), which is the intellection that the First Being intelligizes of itself, is also procession out of itself; the eternal act of this Thought is an eternal genesis of being, of a being that *proceeds* from the Unity of the

18. For comparison with Ismailian theosophy, cf. Nasir-e Khusraw, *Jami' al-Hikmatain*, ch. 12, pp. 145 ff., and our *Etude preliminaire*, pp. 112 ff.

19. Cf. *Kitab al-Shifa'*, II, 620-22.

20. Cf. Nasiraddin Tusi, commentary on the *Isharat*, III, 85.

21. Cf. L. Gardet, *La Pensee religieuse d'Avicenne*, p. 51; cf. the First Being as the First Beloved (Suhrawardi), or "the King whose beauty has no equal" (*Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, ch. 23).

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

necessary Being that is distinguished from it and that, because it is distinguished from it, already includes a duality in its being. It is this First Caused that will be designated under various names through which angelology, rising far above the creatural plane, acquires the meaning of an Epiphany of the First Principle eternally revealing itself to itself. The First Caused is the First Intelligence (*al-'Aql al-awwal*), which, in the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, is the first of the Cherubs (*Karubun*, *Karubiyun*). In Ismailian theosophy he is called the Most Near Archangel, the sacrosanct Archangel. In the Suhrawardian theosophy of Ishraq, he will resume the name of Bahman (*Vohu Manah*), which is the name of the first, after Ohrmazd, of the Amahraspands or Zoroastrian Archangels.

This is not intended as a mere reminder of the Suhrawardian angelology, made in passing. We said before that in the succession of philosophers of Iran it is difficult to draw a perfectly clear line of demarcation between Avicennans and Suhrawardians. The restoration or re-enlistment of Zoroastrian "motifs" by the philosophy of Ishraq is also discernible in the Avicennan line. Among other testimony to this, we have the glosses, themselves constituting a large volume, composed on Avicenna's *Shifa'* by the Sayyed Ahmad 'Alawi, son-in-law of the great Mir Damad (d. 1630), master of philosophy at Ispahan.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, the vision of the possible springing from the necessary, and of the necessary in its turn limited by the possible—this vision of the possible as "impenetrable threshold of absolute nonbeing"—leads a historian of our day to ask: "Is Ahriman, then, not subjugated?"<sup>23</sup>

It is the question of which our Ishraqi Avicennan of Ispahan already had a presentiment, as could any Avicennan with some knowledge of the ancient dualistic philosophy of Iran. He answers it by establishing analogies that constitute a precocious example of "comparative philosophy." Sayyed Ahmad has just commented on Avicenna's schema of the procession of the Multiple; he invokes the Pythagorean principle: "when from the Cause emanates One, there emanates from it not-One"—then immediately refers to the doctrine

22. The work of our Sayyed is mentioned by Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur* (Suppl., II, 590). We shall cite it here from a MS (No. 5) in the collection of our Department of Iranology (Institut Franco-Iranien, Teheran) whose dimensions may give an idea of the fullness of the commentary: 358 x 240 mm. (235 x 140 mm.), 252 foll., 25 lines per page. The

title of "Key to the *Shifa'*" is given by the author himself; it arises from Avicenna's reference, in his prologue, to his "Oriental wisdom," which implies that the text of the *Shifa'* requires a commentary: "Miftahu'sh-Shifa' wal-'Urwatu'l-Wuthqa fi Sharhi Ilahi-yati Kitabi-sh-Shifa'."

23. Quadri, p. 100.

## The Archangels-Cherubs or Intelligences

"said to have been taught by Zoroaster,<sup>24</sup> to wit: when from the First Being an Angel named Yazdan emanated, from his Shadow a demon named Ahriman was innovated into being.<sup>25</sup>—There is here perhaps," he says, "an indication referring to what we ourselves have just set forth. The Angel refers to the higher 'dimensions,'<sup>26</sup> Ahriman to their opposite.<sup>27</sup> *Shadow* is an allusion to the fact that this consequence is inherent (in the emanation of Yazdan), as shadow is inherent in what is obumbrating. In short, the relation of possible being to being, the relation of the intellection (by the Angel) of his own essence to his intellection of his principle, the relation of his own being to his necessary being *ab alto*, the relation of these negativities to these positivities, of these shadows to these principles—all these relations are analogous to the relations of the Iblises with the Angels (that is, of the *devs* with the *Izads*)."

Because our Sayyed is careful to avoid forcibly substituting terms for one another, and instead establishes relational analogies between them, his essay in comparative philosophy remains valid. For the *Shadow*, and everything that

24. Fol. 234<sup>a-b</sup> of the MS cited above: "Yanzuru ilayhi ma waqa'a 'an Fithaghuras al-muta'allahi [234<sup>b</sup>] bi-qawlihi innahu idha sadara 'ani-l-'illati Wahidun, sadara 'anhu La Wahidun, wa-aydan ma waqa'a 'an Zaradosht min annahu idha sadara 'an al-Awwali Malakun sammahu Yazdan hadatha min zillih Shaytanun sammahu Ahriman, wa-la'allahu isharatun ila ma qulna, wa-huwa kaunu'l-Malaki isharatun ila jihatun shari-fatin, wa-Ahriman ila ma yuqabiluhu. Wa-fi qawlihi 'zillun' isharatun ila anna dhalika yalzamuhu kama yalzamu'l-zillu lidhi 'z-zilli, wal-hasilu inna nisbata'l-amkani ila'l-wujud, wa-nisbata't-ta'qquli li-dhatihi ila ta-'aqqulihi li-mubdi'ih, wa-nisbata wujudih ila wujubih bil-ghayri, wa-nisbata tilka'l-'adama'ti ila hadhihi'l-wujudati, wa-nisbata tilka'l-azlali ila hadhihi'l-usuli nisbatu'l-Abalisati ila'l-Maia'ikati."

25. On the name Yazdan (as plural of Izad), here equivalent to Ohrmazd, cf. p. 281, n. 1, and on the variations of ontological "level" on which the appearance of the Antagonist takes place, cf. our "Cyclical Time," p. 135, n. 54. The Zervanism expounded by Shahrastani has undergone profound

dramaturgic changes. In Sayyed Ahmad's text, Zervan does not appear, but the schema in general would correspond to that which Shahrastani attributes to the Gay-Omarthians. With the help of the other *Angels*, Yazdan overcomes the Antagonist born of his doubt, of his *thought*; similarly, in the Ismailian dramaturgy (cf. *ibid.*), the Third Angel (become the Tenth) triumphed over his Iblis, extirpated it from himself. But there remains a Shadow to be overcome—that is, the entire posterity of Iblis-Ahriman; cf. above, pp. 24 ff.

26. That is, to the "dimensions" corresponding to the relation of the First *'Aql* to its Principle, and to its relation to its own being as necessitated by the Principle, a two-fold relation in which a second *'Aql* and the First Soul have their origin; cf. further below.

27. That is, to the "dimension" of shadow or contingency corresponding to the being of the Angel when he meditates on his being considered purely in itself as separate from the Principle that makes its existence necessary; from this dimension of shadow the "matter" of the First Heaven originates.



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

symbolizes with it, undoubtedly stands in the same relation to the positive "dimensions" of the being of the Intelligence as do the Iblises, the *devs*, to the Angels. Nevertheless, this Shadow cannot here be purely and simply a substitute for Ahriman. In our philosophers' schema of the world, the cosmos no longer has its demonic character. The shadow that proceeds from the First Angel is the celestial matter of the First Sphere, and it is a matter greatly superior to terrestrial matter (cf. *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, chs. 15 and 22, § 1, and above, § 2, p. 26). The situation would resemble the one known in Ismailian theosophy, inasmuch as it appears as it were on the "day after" a great drama, the "drama in heaven." The Antagonist, the Iblis, has been conquered by the Angel triumphant over himself,<sup>28</sup> but the consequences of this drama remain to be exhausted; the misdeeds of the posterity of Iblis must needs exhaust themselves. To be sure, the cosmology of our philosophers does not mention this precosmic dramaturgy;<sup>29</sup> but its place is taken precisely by the angelological process of the cosmogony itself, finally reaching the term where Darkness counterbalances Light, as is symbolized, in Suhrawardi's recital, by the two wings of the Angel Gabriel, our Active Intelligence: one wing of light, one of darkness. Now, it is from this Angel that our souls emanate. Such is the situation here on the "day after" the great cosmic drama—that is, at the term to which Darkness has progressed in proportion as the *pleroma* proceeded. It is the realm of the human soul that is the dwelling place of the demons, the Iblises, the *devs* (*Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, chs. 18 ff.); in other words, it is for the human soul to decide whether its angelic or its demonic virtuality is to flower in it. It is in the human soul that the existence of demons is decided, unless the soul "walks in company with the Angel," as *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* invites it to do. Here too there is certainly a dramaturgy, and it too must be understood as still uncompleted. Its denouement is projected upon the exodus, the journey into the Orient, as a retort to the drama of the "descent" into the Occident. In the *pleroma*, this descent has as its final term the Angel from whom our souls originate. It is in him too, in his soteriological mediation, that the "reascent" of souls has its origin.

As for the procession of the *pleroma*, it obeys a ternary rhythm that reproduces the threefold self-intellection of the First Intelligence, for we are to

28. Cf. our "Cyclical Time," pp. 151-57.

29. Whereas in the Ismailian theosophy, it is the cosmology that *results* from the

"drama in heaven," as itself being the simultaneously demiurgic and soteriological or saving work of the Tenth Angel, who assumes the Gnostic role of "saved-savior."

## The Archangels-Cherubs or Intelligences

understand its "phases" as an eternal simultaneity.<sup>30</sup> (a) The First Intelligence or First Cherub intelligizes its own Principle, of which it is itself the intellection, the Thought, and thus it intelligizes itself as thought by the First Being. (b) It intelligizes its own being as a necessary being necessitated by the necessary existence of the First Being, (c) It intelligizes its own being as not necessary *in itself*, as its dimension of nonbeing, zone of shadow delimiting the distance, the lag, between the First Being and itself, the First Archangel-Cherub.—From this triple "dimension" constituted in the First Archangel's being by his threefold intellection of himself, there proceed or are hypostatized respectively: (a) a Second Archangel resembling him; (b) an Angel who is the first of the *Animae coelestes*, the moving Souls of the celestial orbs, composing a hierarchy lower than that of the Cherubs; (c) the highest of the celestial orbs, the highest heaven or Ninth "starless" Sphere.<sup>31</sup> Thus, each of the three—Archangel, Soul, and heaven—respectively hypostatizes the thought, the intellection, of one of the three aspects of its own essence by an Archangel who precedes them. The whole of the being of an Archangel is thus constituted by this *quaternity*. his own personal essence, whence proceed another Archangel, a Soul, and a heaven. The Soul puts this heaven in motion by the desire and aspiration by which it is itself drawn toward the Archangel from whom it emanates and of whom it is the thought. Such is the secret of the motions of the heavens and of their diversity, each motion strictly corresponding to the desire of a Soul.

The same ternary rhythm is repeated from degree to degree. From the three homologous "dimensions" in the being of the Second Archangel-Cherub—who himself hypostatizes the First Archangel's intellection of the First Being—there are hypostatized a Third Cherub, a Second Angel-Soul, and a new heaven, which is the Heaven of the Fixed Stars, to which the Second *Anima coelestis* communicates the motion of its desire. Similarly, the Third Archangel-Intelligence gives origin to a Fourth Cherub, a Third Soul, and a third heaven (which is the seventh in order of ascent from the earth, or Heaven of Saturn). And so the process continues from Archangel to Archangel, from Soul to Soul, from heaven to heaven, until it reaches the Ninth Archangel, who gives origin to a Tenth Intelligence and to the Soul that moves the Heaven of the Moon.

30. Cf. Pierre Duhem, *Le Systeme du monde*, IV, 440 ff. (al-Farabi and Avicenna).

31. Cf. further the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, ch. 16, where, however, this three-

fold self-intellection of the Intelligence, so fundamental in Avicennism, is not expounded by our Iranian commentator.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

This Tenth Intelligence, at the farthest point of the cosmic procession in which the Shadow will reach its maximum, no longer has sufficient energy to engender *one* other Intelligence, *one* Soul, and *one* heaven. As we said, its act of intellection splinters into a multitude of souls, our human souls, at the same time giving origin to elementary Matter. This Tenth Intelligence is the Active Intelligence, that which the *ta'wil* of our philosophers "leads back" to the Holy Spirit or Archangel Gabriel, with his two wings of light and darkness, who appears in Suhrawardi's recital.

This theory of the Intelligences is set forth in terms of pure angelology in a short epistle especially devoted to the theme by Avicenna, the *Risala fi'l-Mald'ika* (Epistle on the Angels). The realm of the Cherubs and the celestial Souls, their beauty and brightness, the mystery of their "occupations," are there described in lyrical terms that echo the direct narration of *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* (ch. 22) as in an epistle of "Oriental philosophy." Our Persian commentator himself methodically interprets the Intelligences and the Souls of the spheres as Archangels-Cherubs (*Fereshtagan-e Karubiyan*) and celestial Angels (*Fereshtagan-e asmani*); and this twofold identification becomes classical among our philosophers. Avicenna's brief epistle still emphasizes the personal reality of the figures of the pleroma, by giving each a proper name. Now, these names are not formed, in the usual way, by suffixing the element *-il* (corresponding to the Aramaic *-el*); here the determinant is different for the Cherubs, each of whom proceeds from the "upper side" of the preceding one, and for the Souls, each of whom proceeds from the "lower side" of the same Cherub. The name composed to designate each of the former is formed with *al-Quds*, "Holiness"; the name of each Soul is formed with *al-'Izza*, "Magnificence" or "Power." The epistle gives the names of the Cherubs as follows: Wajh al-Quds, Face of Holiness;<sup>32</sup> Yaman al-Quds, Right Hand of Holiness; Mulk al-Quds, Royalty of Holiness; Sharaf al-Quds, Nobility of Holiness; Ba's al-Quds, Rigor of Holiness; Sana al-Quds, Brightness of Holiness; Thaqaf al-Quds, Sagacity of Holiness; Ruh al-Quds, Spirit of Holiness; 'Abd al-Quds, Servant of Holiness. Symmetrically, the names of the Angels-Souls are the following: Wajh al-'Izza, Face of Magnificence, and so on: Right Hand of Magnificence, Royalty, Nobility, Rigor, Brightness, Sagacity, Spirit of Magnificence or of Power.<sup>33</sup>

32. Cf. among the Gnostics the Monogene as *Prosopon tou Patros*, Face of the Father; *Prosopon tou aschematistou*, "Face of him who is without figure"; cf. Clement of

Alexandria, *Excerpta*, tr. Sagnard, pp. 80-81 (cf. Casey tr., p. 49).

S3. The passage in the epistle reads: "Fa-maththala 'l-Karuba'l-awwala khulqan

## The Archangels-Cherubs or Intelligences

We had not previously found personal names for the Archangels-Intelligences in our philosophers. Hence this schema leads us to a brief investigation, a mere beginning toward the sketch of comparative angelology that a full elucidation of the "motivations" of the Avicennan doctrine would require. Three points claim our attention, because they here connect Avicenna's angelology with that of other celebrated visionary recitals, notably that of the visions of Enoch. There is the designation of the Intelligences as Cherubs; there is the fact that the "father" of our Hayy ibn Yaqzan is named "Yaqzan," *Vigilans*—that is, Watcher—and thus shows at least a kinship with the "Watchers" of the books of Enoch, among whom figure, precisely, the Cherubs; finally, there is in Avicenna's little *Epistle on the Angels* the designation of our Active Intelligence as 'Abd al-Quds.

The image of the *Kerubim* takes us back to the earliest Biblical visions, and majidan 15 juhjabu 'ani'l-manzari'l-a'la bi-wasitin . . . wa-ansha'a ininhu—min janibihi'l-a'la—nuran yahkihi . . . fa-maththala Karuban akhara . . . wa-kadhalika ansha'a min kulli Karubin Karuban wa-atammahum 'adadan ma'dudan. Wa-qad-dama ila 'l-awwali min Karubihi fa-ansha'a min janibihi 'l-adna Ruhan . . . fa-kadhalika ansha'a min kulli Karubin—min janibihi 'l-adna—Ruhan. . . . Wa-ansha'a min adna 'l-Karubina w-mimma yalihi zillan mamdudan. . . . Fa-mina'l-Karubina Wajhu'l-Quds, wa-Yamanu'l-Quds, wa-Mulku'l-Quds, wa-Sharafu'l-Quds, wa-Ba'su'l-Quds, wa-Sana al-Quds, wa-Thaqafu'l-Quds, wa-Ruhu'l-Quds, wa-'Abdu'l-Quds, wa-likulli minhum hizbun mina'l-Mala'ikati la tahsuna . . . wa-mina'l-akharina Wajhu'l-zza, wa-Yamanuha, wa-Mulkuha, wa-Sharafuha, wa-Ba'suh5, wa-Sanaha, wa-Thaqafuha, wa-Ruhuha, wa-likulli minhum hizbun min al-Mala'ikati la tahsuna." Thus there are nine Intelligences and eight Souls (each here called Spirit, *Ruh*). This would presuppose either that the Ninth Sphere is not included in the cosmological schema (which is unlikely, since the prologue entrusts *Arsh* and *Kursi* respectively to the first two Souls) or that the Active Intelligence, the tenth of the Cherubs, is identified with the Intelligence of the Heaven of the Moon. Instead, our Persian commentator on *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* will schematize not a simple decad but a *hendecad*. I have indicated these variants and this schema of *eleven* Intelligences, p. 369, n. 21. The variants represent hesitations corresponding to those of celestial physics in respect to the number of encompassing spheres and of secondary spheres (cf. below, §9); traces of these hesitations can be found in our manuscripts of *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* (cf. ch. 16 of the text and the commentary). I have cited the *risala* above from MSS. Koprulu 1589, Nur Osmaniye 4894, and Ahmet III, 2447, photographic reproductions of which I owe, respectively, to Messrs. Ahmet Atesh and C. Kuentz. I intended to publish this edifying little epistle in its entirety. Unfortunately, despite its shortness, it presents several indecipherable sentences. The copyists may have been thrown off by the style, and it is impossible to supply what they should have read; the MSS cited were apparently of the same family, they are of little mutual assistance; we have therefore had to content ourselves provisionally with this brief citation in support of the angelology of *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

thus to the speculative mysticism of Judaism and Christianity. The Cherubs of the Old Testament always appear in connection with divine theophanies: they mediatize the presence of God in this world.<sup>34</sup> The etymology of their name affords nothing certain; in any case, the exegetes who reject any abstract scientific deduction that would result in setting up a filiation with certain theriomorphic representations of foreign mythologies seem to be on solid ground. Here again even the artificial etymologies given for names of divine realities by those who believe in them at least instruct us concerning the believers' inner representation of them. We may note the human appearance, and especially the idea of human youth, which are associated with the vision of the *Kerubim* as well as with the etymology attempted for their names.<sup>36</sup> With the famous visions of Ezekiel, the form and appearance of the Cherubs assume a great complexity, but the Prophet's luxuriant imagination left a considerable margin of freedom to the speculative imagination of mystics. In Philo as in the Greek Fathers (Didymus), the *Kerub* especially suggests the idea of knowledge and wisdom (*gnosis* and *sophia*) or of power (Theodoret), and similarly in the Latin Fathers (*scientiae multitudo*, *plenitudo scientiae*).<sup>36</sup> In the celestial hierarchies of Dionysius, the Cherubs are put in the second rank of the first of the three hierarchies, and are held to excel in contemplation and knowledge, while, above them, the Seraphs excel in love.<sup>37</sup> The idea of similar celestial hierarchies, with their correspondences or typifications in the spiritual, corporeal, and hieratic universes, is accepted in Islam chiefly by Ismailian Gnosticism. There we find Seven Cherubs or Seven Divine Words whose rank is between the second and tenth ranks of the decad.<sup>38</sup>

34. Cf. J. J. Herzog, *Realencyklopadie ur protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, art. "Bundeslade" (III, 553), art. "Engel" (V. 369-70).

35. Cf. James Hastings, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, art. "Cherub," III, 509.

36. Cf. *ibid.*, III, 510.

37. Cf. *The Celestial Hierarchies* [of pseudo-Dionysius], pp. 26 ff.

38. Their rank results from the "drama in heaven" that preceded our cosmos; their heptad begins with the third rank, first occupied by the Archangel who became the tenth after his "fault" and repentance; cf.

further R. Strothmann, *Gnosis-Texte der Ismailiten*, xiii, 1, p. 132, and xiii, 27, p. 125, where the etymology of the word *Karub* is given after Mu'ayyad Shirazi and as the symbolism of the worlds admits motivating the esoteric hierarchy by its correspondence with that of the Seven Cherubs. The Arabic root *krb* gives the idea of "ligature," "shackle": "the cherubic dignitaries are, then, those who are freed from the shackle of bodies and the prison of *physis*, may God unite us with them!" (p. 125, l. 12). "Wa-amma 'l-hududu'l-karubiyatu fa-hum alladhina takhallasu min karbi'l-ajsami wa-asri't-tabl'ati, ja'alana Allahu ma'ahum!"

## The Archangels-Cherubs or Intelligences

From these few very general data of the cherubinic universe, we may separate certain others more directly illustrative of the angelological statements of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* and its commentary. They are to be found in the books of Enoch. The one known as III Enoch describes the beauty and brightness of the *Kerubim* and of their Angel-Prince Kerubiel.<sup>39</sup> Still more precisely, there is the *pleroma* of the eight great Angels-Princes in whom the figure of Yahweh is multiplied, since they are themselves called Yahweh "by the name of their king"—that is, the Tetragram enters into the composition of their names (e.g., 'Anaphiel YHWH).<sup>40</sup> The traditions vary as to the number (eight or sixteen) and the function of these Angels, whom their name, composed with the Tetragram, exalts above all others (cf. above, in Avicenna's *Epistle on the Angels*, the names formed with *Quds* and *'Izza*). Their *ogdoad* has not failed to give rise to comparisons with Gnostic conceptions: the Seven Protoktistes (First Created), with the Monogene or Prototokos who is the Face of the Father, "Face of him who is without figure"<sup>41</sup> (cf. above the names Face of Holiness and Face of Magnificence given to the First Archangel and the First Soul). III Enoch also describes the seven Archangels who are princes of the seven heavens, and their innumerable following of Angels (the same detail in the text cited above, n. 33). In I Enoch they are the *Watchers*.<sup>42</sup>

In short, variants and correspondences here offer a boundless field to the speculative imagination. In the Avicennan recital, Yaqzan, "Watcher," father of Hayy, is one of the Cherubs. Now, the relation between the Cherubs and the Watchers is strikingly indicated in this other vision of Enoch:<sup>43</sup> "And it came to pass . . . that my spirit was translated And it ascended into the heavens: And I saw the holy sons of God. They were stepping on flames of fire: Their garment were white (and their raiment), And their faces shone like snow. . . . And he translated my spirit into the heaven of heavens, and I saw there as it were a structure built of crystals, And between those crystals tongues of living fire. And my spirit saw the girdle which girt that house of

39. Cf. Hugo Odeberg, *3 Enoch; or, The Hebrew Book of Enoch*, pt. II, pp. 72 ff.

40. Cf. *ibid.*, pt. I, pp. 84 ff. and 148-49; pt. II, pp. 29 n., 57 ff., 104 n.; Hans Bietenhard, *Die himmlische Welt im Urchristentum und Spätjudentum*, p. 155.

41. Cf. Clement of Alexandria, tr. Sag-nard, pp. 77 ff. and 115, n. 3 (cf. Casey tr., pp. 49, 51).

42. Cf. Odeberg, pt. II, pp. 45 ff. Their names and order vary. Here: Michael, Gabriel, Shatqiel, Shahaqiel, Badariel, Barakiel, Pazriel. In I Enoch (xx:1), we have: Uriel, Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Saraqiel, Gabriel, Remiel. In this passage the *Watchers* are the seven Archangels.

43. I Enoch LXXI:1-7; cf. xx:1 (note above).

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

fire. . . . And round about were Seraphim, Cherubim, and Ophannim: And these are *they who sleep not* And guard the throne of His glory." <sup>44</sup> On the one hand, then, the seven Archangels who are princes of the seven heavens, on the other hand, the *Kerubim*, form part of these *Egregoroi*, the Vigilkeepers, or Watchers, "they who sleep not." The name of Hayy ibn Yaqzan, "Living, son of Watcher," thus declares his "kinship." <sup>45</sup> To be sure, it must not be overlooked that I Enoch speaks of Watchers in two senses or perhaps after two traditions: (1) there is a tradition that represents the Watchers as "fallen Angels" (identical with the sons of God in Gen. vi), but there is (2) a tradition that places the Watchers as the Most Nigh to the Divine Presence, those who *sleep not* above in heaven. <sup>46</sup>

Not less striking than this relation between Watchers and Cherubs, Yaqzan and Karub, is the designation that the short epistle above mentioned bestows on the Active Intelligence: 'Abd al-Quds. Through it this excursus in comparative angelology returns to its point of departure. The Angel Metatron, the central figure of III Enoch, is called precisely Ebed (= Na'ar), the Servant, *puer*, the Child <sup>47</sup>—and he receives this title as prince of the Presence, theophanic form of the Holy One who cannot show Himself to men; hence he is even called "the little Yahweh," the Knower of secrets, especially in the passages in which Enoch-Metatron symbolizes the unification of the earthly and the heavenly man. Here again it would not be difficult to enter more deeply into certain analogies in the relations between the adept and Hayy ibn Yaqzan and those of Enoch-Metatron. <sup>48</sup> Moreover, Levi ben Gerson, deriving the name of Metatron from the Latin *mater*, defines that Angel as Active Intelligence. <sup>49</sup> Thus our cycle is closed. Our pursuit of the visions of the Cherubs and the Watchers in Enoch, of the Servant or the Child, the divinity's substitute

44. R. H. Charles, ed., *The Apocrypha*, II, 235-36; italics ours.

45. We do not intend to affirm a material historical filiation here; the recurrence of the name-archetype is in itself sufficiently interesting for religious phenomenology.

46. Odeberg, pt. II, p. 97.

47. Cf. *ibid.*, pt. II, p. 173 n.

48. *Ibid.*, pt. I, p. 122. Metatron as First Spirit, from whom all individual Spirits have emanated, is present in the latter and in all men as long as they remain in contact with the divine spiritual source (pt. I, p.

123). Metatron represents the pilgrimage of the Spirit, its descent and ascension. The identity of Metatron with Enoch symbolizes the descent of the Spirit into earthly life—that is, into the existence of earthly man—and the ascent of this earthly man to heavenly being. In heaven he is the interpreter of man's pilgrimage. As to the etymologies of his name (Metator, Mithra, Mater-Matrona, related to the Shakhina, Metathronos, etc.), cf. *ibid.*, pt. I, p. 125 (he is also found in the Druse angelology).

49. *Ibid.*, pt. I, p. 135.

## The Archangels-Cherubs or Intelligences

**and** individuation, Active Intelligence and "mother" of our souls, leads us back to the last figure of the Avicennan schema of the procession of the Intelligences, such constancy does angelology appear to show in the recurrence of its figures and their meanings. Whether it be Metatron as *protos Anthropos* and Active Intelligence,<sup>50</sup> or the Active Intelligence as Holy Spirit and Archangel Gabriel, or as Holy Spirit and Angel of Humanity in the philosophy of Ishraq, the same figure never ceases to manifest itself to mental vision under this angelophany. At the end of the theory of the Archangels-Intelligences, we find this figure, with its functions and with its epiphanies that individualize its relations to each one of *its* souls. We are thus led back to the situation glimpsed at the end of the preceding paragraph.

The appearance or the mental visualization of the Angel who is the Active Intelligence simultaneously marks the *terminus* of an evolution within the soul, which has had to bring this aptitude to progressive flowering in itself, and a *point of departure*, the origin of an angelic pedagogy (Hayy ibn Yaqzan's final invitation). This pedagogy will inaugurate a new relation—personal and conscious, confiding and loving—between the Angel *Dator formarum* and the soul whose contemplative intellect he "activates." For this mental visualization to be possible, for the soul to *see itself* in this relation with the Angel, to understand itself as "journeying with him" in its pilgrimage toward **the** Orient, it must have such an Image of itself as it can project and realize in the vision of this *dualitude*. This Image of itself is precisely that which the structure of the soul's two intellective powers draws "in the image" of the beings of the angelic pleroma. These are the two aspects or the two faces of the soul that will be brought on the stage by the dramaturgy of the *Recital of Salaman and Absal*. This Image, by showing the soul the relation of its practical to its contemplative intellect (the angel who writes and the angel who dictates), at the same time declares to the soul its own relation toward the Active Intelligence, in virtue of the structural homology that governs the whole hierarchy of powers, those of the soul as well as those of the angelic pleroma. Identifying itself with its contemplative intellect, the soul sees itself in the same relation toward the Active Intelligence as its practical intellect holds toward itself. Verifying the analogy so often repeated, it sees itself in **the** same relation toward the Active Intelligence as each Angel-Soul holds **toward** its Angel-Intelligence. The truth of this analogy, then, supposes an

50. Ibid., pt. I, p. 123, n. 1.



## \ Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

individuation that, on the side of the soul, can be measured only by the soul's potential "angelicity," whose perfect flowering is its goal; the principle that attributes the individuation of Forms to Matter can no longer suffice here.

What remains is the kinship and the analogy between *Animae coelestes* and *animae humanae*, for this analogy is exemplary. This is why any system of angelology and cosmology that should sacrifice the notion of the celestial Soul would *eo ipso* imperil its psychology and the meaning of that psychology. The imbalance of the angelology would destroy the pedagogy that presupposes it and the goal of which is the *exegesis* of the soul, which is to be led back to its pleromatic origin. It is the glory and the originality of Avicenna and Avicennism to have maintained and affirmed the notion of celestial Souls. It is the great objection that was to be brought against them by Averroism. But the stake is immense. The twofold notion of celestial Angels-Souls and of terrestrial—that is, virtual—angels-souls establishes, as its absence invalidates, the idea of angelic pedagogy—that is, the horizon on which our visionary recitals, both Avicenna's and Suhrawardi's, open and close. Before analyzing the propositions and purposes of this "celestial" pedagogy, we must, then, rehearse the positions implied in the establishment or the rejection of the idea of celestial Souls.

### 7. *The Celestial Angels or Souls*

An example of a modification of this ternary rhythm with which the existence of the celestial Souls is connected occurs in a passage of the treatise known to the Latin Schoolmen under the title *Philosophia Algazelis*.<sup>51</sup> Two "dimensions" and no more are considered in each Consequent. In the First Intelligence the "dimensions" considered are the possibility of its being, taken in itself; and the necessity of its being, in relation to its Principle. In so far as it is possible, it is virtual; in so far as it is necessary, it is actual. Now, it knows its own being and it knows its Principle, a twofold intellection that is hypostatized in two beings: another Angel and a heaven. There is, then, no longer a Soul to form

51. Cf. Duhem, *Le Systeme du monde*, IV, 444. On the misunderstanding through which this work was held to represent the thought of Ghazzali, cf. Iltienne Gilson, *La Philosophie au Moyen Age*, p. 356. In addition, if the treatise attempted anything more than to set forth the "Intentions" (*maqasid*) of the philosophers, it would fall into contradictions; beside this binary schema, we should see Ghazzali agreeing with Avicenna and Farabi on the existence of the Souls (Duhem, IV, 445).

## The Celestial Angels or Souls

a triad; this fact abolishes the relation of the Soul to the Archangel-Intelligence from which it emanates, the relation that Avicennism presented as the archetype of that of human souls to the Active Intelligence. The entire schema of angelology is thus undermined and, with it, the foundation on which the corresponding psychology was erected.<sup>82</sup>

It was Averroism that was to deal the hardest blow to the Avicennan angelology. Averroes criticizes the cosmo-angelology of Avicennism for its triadic schema interposing the *Anima coelestis* between the separate Intelligence and the body of the celestial sphere.<sup>63</sup> The mover of a celestial orb is a virtue, a finite energy, which nevertheless acquires an infinite power through its desire toward a being that is neither a body nor a power subsisting in a body, but a separate Intelligence. By knowing this Intelligence, the mover of the celestial orb desires it with an eternal desire, from which the eternity of the celestial motion arises. But if the name of *soul* can be given to this Energy that, for each sphere, is its mover through its desire that aspires toward the Intelligence, it is by a pure and simple *homonymy* with the soul that animates the living beings of the sublunary world. The Averroist angelology cannot, then, accept the twofold angelic hierarchy of Avicennism, the detailed account of which in the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* further tends to remind us of its fundamental importance both for cosmology and anthropology. On the contrary, to accept this Avicennan conception of the *Anima coelestis* is, according to Averroes, to commit "the error of a tyro in philosophy" (*error incipientis in philosophia*),<sup>54</sup> Certainly, such a severe judgment, issuing from the authority of Averroes, could be mortifying to any philosopher who felt that he was its object, if the "tyro" did not find himself in such good and illustrious company as that of Avicenna.

The Averroistic critique of the Avicennan schema also undermines the order of the eternal Emanation of the pleroma; it postulates that the intervention of the famous principle *ex uno non Jit nisi unum* is as inopportune as the conception of celestial Angels as the moving Souls of the spheres. Averroes is determined to be a Peripatetic of the strict observance. Consequently, the idea of a separate Intelligence being the cause of the Intelligence that follows

52. These two "dimensions" are also "theosophy of the Orient of Lights"; cf. our mentioned alone in the philosophy of Ishraq "Prolegomenes II," pp. 44-45.

(cf. our edition of the *Hikmat al-Ishraq*, § 150, p. 138); yet even there the Souls named 53. Cf. Duhem, IV, 549 ff., and Gardet, *Pensee*, p. 55.

"Espahbad" emanate in accordance with the order **and** the perspective proper to this

54. Duhem, *ibid.*

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

it seems to him as unintelligible as any idea of a creative cause. Yet the cosmos must still contain a principle of hierarchic subordination, but it must be conceived quite differently. According to Aristotle's metaphysics, each sphere is moved by the desire to assimilate itself with the Intelligence proper to it; each forms a sort of closed system with its Intelligence. For Averroes, the mover of each celestial sphere *equally* desires the moving Intelligence of the highest sphere. This opens the possibility of reversing the descending order of the Avicennan procession, according to which each Intelligence, by its self-intellection, produces the Intelligence that follows it and the Soul of its own heaven. Now the separate Intelligence can be the cause of a celestial "soul," not because it thinks that soul, but because it is known by that "soul"; it is no longer creative cause but final cause, or, rather, inasmuch as—and because—it is final cause, it is active cause. In this sense, the moving Intelligence of the highest orb can, as object of desire, be the final cause of all the celestial movers. Hence the famous principle *ex uno non fit nisi unum* must be dethroned, and with it the order of causality that it determined.<sup>55</sup> Once it is posited and admitted that "what is comprehended is cause of what comprehends," it appears that *one and the same* substance, intelligent and intelligible, can very well be the cause of *several* beings at the same time, for these various beings comprehend it, each after its fashion: what the mover of the body of the First Heaven comprehends of the Prime Mover is different from what the mover (or Form or "soul") of the Orb of Saturn comprehends of it.<sup>66</sup>

It is hardly necessary to indicate the profound change that will follow and will orient the Averroistic and the Avicennan angelologies in entirely different directions. Though it is impossible here to develop the comparison at the length that would be desirable, we will say that in the Averroistic vision of the world the pure Acts or Intelligences that move the celestial bodies<sup>57</sup> are at once their active causes in giving them their Form and their final causes in giving them motion. But it is precisely in giving them their Form that the Intelligences are cause of their motion, since "their Forms are nothing but the Ideas that the celestial bodies entertain of their movers."<sup>58</sup> Now, it is in knowing the sepa-

55. We mentioned above (p. 56, n. 17) summarize here.

Nasiraddin Tusi's own attempt to free speculative vision from this principle. We shall have occasion to return to it again in our exposition of the philosophy of Ishraq.

56. Cf. Duhem, IV, 554-55, which we

57. What we call celestial motions, attraction, gravitation, etc., are here, then, intellectual Acts, **the Acts of** conscious Intelligences.

58. Gilson, p. 364.

## The Celestial Angels or Souls

**rate** Intelligences, the Principle that is its mover, that each orb moves with an eternal motion of desire toward it, and it is through this desire that the Intelligence is its mover. From the point of view of *Avicennan* emanationism, the *Anima coelestis* hypostatizes the thought that the Intelligence has of itself, in so far as the Intelligence intelligizes its own essence as necessitated by its Principle. Its heaven, the celestial matter of its orb, hypostatizes its knowledge of nonbeing contained in its being, the pure possibility of its essence, when the latter is considered in itself, apart from its necessary Emanation from the Principle. Here, in Avicennism, the eternal motion imparted to the sphere by the Soul expresses not an intellectual desire—that is, the intellectual act representing its good and its perfection to itself, and thus actuating and realizing the cosmic Order—but an incompleteness, an unfulfillment, an aspiration toward the still Unrealized, something that might pass for an Avicennan "romanticism."

The difference between the Averroistic and Avicennan conceptions of angelology will, then, modalize the human soul's relations to the Active Intelligence in quite different tonalities on the one side and the other. Now, the concrete situations from which our Avicennan recitals issued and which they typify certainly presuppose the Avicennan *Imago mundi*. The Iranian commentator on *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* will more than once remind us of the homogeneity and homology between the *Anima coelestis* and the *anima humana*. Would not the elimination of the *Anima coelestis* as a celestial Angel, lower in condition than the order of *Kerubim*, necessarily entail the elimination of the human soul understood as "terrestrial angel"? It is the whole destiny of the Soul that is thus put in question—of the Soul whose ontological status of intermediate or minor angel is rejected in favor of pure intellect.

Hence the issue involved in the problem of the human intellect will also be understood quite differently. When the human soul, because of its twofold intellectual power—speculative and practical, typifying the twofold angelic hierarchy—is accorded the status of virtual angelicity (*fereshtagi*), it is regarded as at least called, by reason of its essence, to become pure Form. From this point of view, will its individuality still result from the only individuation of which Matter is the principle, and which constitutes only *numerically* different individuals within the same species? Or is there not rather to be conceived for it an individuation in conformity with the angelic condition, which postulates not only a numerical individuation within the same species, but an individuality

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

specific in itself?<sup>59</sup> The question does not arise, of course, save when there is mention, as here, of terrestrial angels (*fereshtagan-e zamini*). This denomination is founded on the two powers—that is, the two *faces*—of the human soul, which constitute its being as a virtual syzygy in the image of the pleroma. This structure presupposes that the individual soul be admitted to possess an *intellectus possibilis* in its own right. And this is precisely what Avicennism does. Averroes, on the other hand, grants the individual only an *intellectus passivus*, a mere disposition to receive the intelligibles, which, furthermore, perishes with the body. This, of course, is the great problem of Averroism: what is to be said of individual immortality? But this touches upon the very interpretation of Averroism, which absorbed the speculative efforts of several centuries of Latin Scholasticism.

There can be no question of confronting the two positions here; indeed, the present state of research still allows us only a confused view of the relations between Avicennism and Averroism in the West down to the Renaissance. But it is not too difficult to perceive the difference between them in respect to the relation of the individual intellect to the Active Intelligence, a relation upon which the angelic pedagogy that allows the soul to undertake its journey into the Orient will here be founded. From the Averroistic point of view, the receptivity to intelligibles engendered in the passive intellect of the terrestrial individual is only the Active Intelligence itself, "particularizing itself in a soul as light does in a body." But the light does not belong to the body: "Everything eternal and eternalizable in the individual belongs wholly to the Active Intelligence and is immortal only through its immortality."<sup>60</sup> Here already—or once again—we must rise to another conception of individuality than that which follows from matter as principle of individuation. From the Avicennan point of view, the *intellectus possibilis*, in receiving the illumination of the Active Intelligence, already receives a guarantee of immortality. It is *brought into act* by the Active Intelligence; the latter produces intelligible knowledge in it as the sun produces sight in the eyes by its light. Even more than sight and that which is seen, the Active Intelligence is what *enables seeing*.

59. It was in accordance with the Thomist concept of the individuation of Angels that Leibniz, elaborating his monadology, proposed to conceive the individuation of souls as such. "What St. Thomas affirms upon this point regarding Angels or Intelligences (*quod ibi omne individuum est species*

*infima*) is true of all substances, provided that the specific difference be taken as geometricians take it in respect to their figures" [*Discours de metaphysique*, ed. E. Thouverez, § 9, p. 23]; cf. Heinrich Ropohl, *Das Eine und die Welt*, p. 97.

60. Gilson, p. 367.

## The Celestial Angels or Souls

This is because here the human intellect is not a mere disposition to intelligible knowledge; it is the partner of the Angel, the "traveling companion" who is guided by the Angel and whom, on his side, the Angel needs in order to solemnize his divine service—that is, to irradiate Forms and thereby to rise toward his Principle (cf. *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, ch. 25). It is in a sense quite different from Averroism that, here in the Avicennan view, the relation to the Active Intelligence is the guarantee of continued existence, and is so because this relation presupposes precisely the notion of soul, for here our soul behaves toward the Active Intelligence as does each *Nafs* toward its *'Aql*, each celestial Angel toward its *Kerub*. So it is important that we gain a conception of what, *in itself*, necessitates, together with their notion, the median and mediating position of these celestial Souls that Averroes rejected as superfluous. This necessity in relation to the human soul will subsequently become apparent from the viewpoint of a twofold pedagogy: at once as they intervene "personally" and as they offer themselves to the soul as a model.

From each separate Intelligence a heaven emanates. It is the Intelligence that moves this heaven, through the love and desire of which it is the goal; but the proximate principle of the movement of this celestial orb cannot be a purely intellectual Energy that should be subject to no mutation and should in no way *imagine* particular things.<sup>61</sup> The ternary rhythm of Emanation brings it about that from each Intelligence there proceed not only another Intelligence and a heaven, but also a Soul intermediate and mediatory between this heaven and the Intelligence from which it emanates. The Soul hypostatizes not the higher "dimension" of the Intelligence—that is, its intellection of the Principle from which it originates—but a mean "dimension"—that is, its intellection of its own being as necessitated by the necessity of its Principle. As such, the Soul does not find perfection in the first state in which it is constituted. "Hence it is ever after assailed by the desire, the love (*'ishq*) that carries it toward what is not yet realized in it, toward its principle of perfection. It is in order to attain to this that it will put in motion the body that is dependent on it. Its existence is necessary in the hierarchy of beings to explain this motion."<sup>62</sup>

In the human soul, this situation of the celestial Souls has its counterpart in that one of the soul's two intellective powers which is called the *intellectus practicus* (*'aql-e kar-kun*) and which is typified as being that one of the two

61. Cf. commentary on the *Kitab al-Najat* (Cairo, A.H. 1357, p. 259) by Gardet, p. 55.

62. Ibid.; compare *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, ch. 22 of our edition and translation.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

"terrestrial angels" whose "place is on the left," the one whose duty it is to write—that is, to act and execute—what is dictated by the angel whose "place is on the right." Celestial Souls and human souls share the modality of not being purely intelligential or intellective in the first constitution of their essence; they have in common the function of ruling and governing physical bodies.<sup>63</sup> To do this, they must *imagine*. The whole immense world of the imaginable, the universe of symbol (*'alam al-mithal*), would not exist without the soul. But here the celestial Souls possess a superiority; at the very origin of their being, they receive from the Intelligence or Archangel from whom they emanate everything requisite for the exercise of their being. The body with which they are furnished and which "materializes" the thought of the same Archangel is made of a "celestial matter," a subtle and incorruptible *quinta essentia*.<sup>64</sup> For this reason, and because, unlike human imaginations, theirs are not dependent on sensible knowledge, their imaginations are *true*.<sup>65</sup> Each Soul "moves its sphere with a motion that is natural, perpetual, and circular, but the motive force of which is the Soul's will and loving desire to assimilate itself with the perfectly happy Intelligence from which it emanates."<sup>66</sup>

Contrary to Averroes' tenet, the Soul is, then, necessary as "proximate cause" of the motion of the celestial orb. The Intelligence cannot be the proximate Mover, it cannot directly be what the orb seeks, for even a celestial body cannot receive the essence of the separate Intelligence; the latter cannot subsist in it.<sup>67</sup> But what the Soul tenderly desires is precisely to assimilate itself with the Intelligence by becoming like it,<sup>68</sup> as the disciple makes himself like his master, or the lover like the beloved. To do this, the Soul must "grasp the beauty of the object that it loves; the image of that beauty increases the ardor of its love; this ardor makes the soul look upward, and thence arises a motion by which it can apply itself to the object with which it desires to assimilate itself. Thus imagination of beauty causes ardor of love, love causes desire (*inquisitio*), and desire causes motion."<sup>69</sup>

63. Cf. commentary on *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, ch. 9, § 5 (pp. 312-13 of our translation).

64. Cf. *ibid.*, ch. 15 and ch. 22, § 1 (tr. pp. 333 ff. and 362 ff.).

65. Since the Imagination can be angel or demon (Suhrawardi), it is essentially the first alternative that is realized in the *Animae coelestes* and, through them, in human souls.

66. Cf. *Najat*, pp. 263-67, cited in

Gardet, "En l'Honneur du millenaire d'Avicenne," p. 340. It is this conception of the celestial motions that will provoke the sarcasms of William of Auvergne, in his lack of any sense of the vision that it implies; cf. below, § 10.

67. Cf. Duhem, IV, 446.

68. *Shifa'*, II, 615.

69. *Ibid.*, cited in Duhem, IV, 447.

## The Celestial Angels or Souls

Avicenna's speculative vision is here already colored by the fires of the *cognitio matutina*. It will attain definition in a mental dramaturgy in the prologue to the admirable little spiritual romance that Suhrawardi entitled *The Familiar of the Mystical Lovers* (*Mu'nis al-Ushshaq*). There the three beings who proceed from the threefold self-intellection of the Intelligence bear three names that, despite appearances, are less abstractions than typifications, since they have correspondences in three names from Biblico-Koranic hagiography (Joseph, Zulaykha, Jacob). The three figures that proceed from the meditation of the First Archangel reflecting upon his being are named Beauty, Love, Sadness. Of these three *dramatis personae*, Sadness corresponds to the heaven whose subtle matter "materializes" the thought of a nonbeing; it measures the zone of shadow, the distance that always intrudes between Love and the Beauty to which it aspires—that is, between the celestial Angel and the Angel-Cherub. But at the same time this heaven, this Sadness, is the instrument that allows the Soul, by the roundabout way of a long pilgrimage, to approach that Beauty, to attain the goal of its desire, just as, by moving its heaven, the Soul tends toward the Angel from whom it emanates. Thus the same nostalgia that is close to the secret of the mystic's heart is likewise the secret of celestial physics.<sup>70</sup>

This vision, with its subtle and delicate symbolism, is perhaps also a testimony to the assistance that the *Animae coelestes* render to the *anima humana*—that is, a testimony to the pedagogy the role of which they assume toward it by a direct intervention. Below the greater Orient of the pure cherubic Intelligences, the schema of Ishraq places an intermediate Orient, the world of symbols, which is the "clime" of the celestial Angels or Souls. It is these who inspire, who make visible to the Imagination as organ of metamorphoses, the symbolic visions that come to prophets and theosophic Sages. The cases of the two groups are not greatly different, for if the Prophet received his revelations from the Angel Gabriel, it is none the less true that, for each mystical Sage, joining himself with the Active Intelligence (which is but the speculative name of the Angel Holy Spirit) is each time equivalent to becoming the "seal of prophecy."<sup>71</sup> The personal assistance that the celestial Souls render to the human soul post mortem only continues their first assistance. To raise itself step by step toward the world of Pure Intelligence, through the successive

, 70. A new translation of *The Familiar of the Mystical Lovers* will appear in the volume of translations of Suhrawardi's recitals announced above (p. 43, n. 50).

71. Cf. the *ta'wil* of the *shaqq al-qamar* (splitting of the moon) in Sa'inaddin Is-pahani's treatise; see our "Prolegomenes II," pp. 53 ff.



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

states of its posthumous becoming, the soul must be enveloped in the subtle celestial body that will have been "organized" for it by the Images, the symbols, and the dreams dispensed by the celestial Souls.<sup>72</sup> The world of symbols and of archetypal Images is also the world of remembrance (*'alam al-dhikr*); it is the celestial Souls who preserve the traces of all particular things.<sup>73</sup> It is not by chance that Avicenna, alluding to these difficult questions in one, of his glosses on the *Theology* of Aristotle, refers to his own "Oriental wisdom." Here is the program of questions in which the "Oriental" theosophy of Suhrawardi will culminate in its turn.<sup>74</sup>

Both when our philosophers are "leading back" the Active Intelligence to the Holy Spirit or Archangel Gabriel and when they are meditating on the relation of the Active Intelligence to the human soul, we must bear in mind the affective tonality, even the tenderness, that for them is attached to this relationship. Then perhaps we shall avoid any talk of a rationalism or an intellectualism guilty of reducing spirit to intellect. "The Active Intelligences adorn and perfect the soul, the latter being for them as their child; for the intellective nature [*aqliya*] of the soul is not given with its substance [*ja-wharlya*~\; it is acquired [*mustafada*].<sup>75</sup> This gloss occurs in the margin of a passage in the *Theology* of Aristotle in which the human soul is described as the child of the Active Intelligence, who is also the parent who sees to its education. "It is the Intelligence that perfects the soul, since it is the Intelligence that gave it birth."<sup>76</sup>

Here, then, the relation of the soul to the Active Intelligence is expressed with unmistakable clarity as the relation of child to parent. Elsewhere too the *Theology* of Aristotle will describe the union between the angelic Active Intelligence and the soul's potential intellect as accompanied by an incomparable love and joy. This union crowns a mutual desire, for if the thinking human soul owes its existence to the Active Intelligence, and even cannot subsist save by being united with it, reciprocally this angelic Active Intelligence needs

72. Cf. Vajda, "Notes," pp. 403-04 (viii, 3 and 4), and Gardet, "Enl'Honneur," pp. 343-44.

73. This is why Ibn 'Arabi (cf. p. 359, n. 1) will see in them the "angels who write" (who, in *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, ch. 21, typify the *intellectus practicus* of the human soul).

74. Compare Suhrawardi, *Hikmat al-Ishraq*, pp. 208 ff., 232 ff. of our edition.

75. Cf. Vajda, p. 405 = Badawi's edn., p. 72.

76. Cf. below, § 8, where this notion of the soul's angelic preceptor will lead to that of the Perfect Nature as "angel of the philosopher" and to the plurality of Perfect Natures, the problem of which was well formulated by Abu'l-Barakat.

## Angelic Pedagogy and Individuation

the thinking human soul as receptacle and pre-eminent intermediary (*Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, ch. 25), in order to send into this world the influx of its Energies, the gift of intelligible Forms coming to inform Matter. Thus the love between the angelic Intelligence and the soul is compared not only to the affection between parent and child, between master and disciple, but to the reciprocal love of lovers.<sup>77</sup>

In view of this union, the celestial Souls offer themselves no longer as direct helpers but as models to be imitated. The human soul is to hear and obey a *Werde was du bist*. On the soul's side, it acquires its *'aqliya* (its intellectual nature); on the Angel's side, he perfects his child. These two complementary aspects define the journey into the Orient, in the terms of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, as "traveling in company with the Angel." It is by being in this company that the soul stands to the Active Intelligence in the same relation as does each celestial Soul to the Angel-Cherub. Hence a situation arises that is at once propounded and resolved by our visionary recitals. The idea of angelic pedagogy is bound up with an individuation of the soul, whose task they together concretely propose.

### 8. *Angelic Pedagogy and Individuation*

The relation of filiation that makes the human soul the child of the Active Intelligence illuminates the latter figure with a light that brings out the personal traits that our philosophers constantly identified in it. It is thus that the Active Intelligence is the Holy Spirit.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, that the Holy Spirit is identical with the person of the Angel Gabriel is a Koranic datum, but the identification was already made in the *Ascension of Isaiah*.<sup>79</sup> The Active Intelligence being identified with the Angel Gabriel, the Angel of Knowledge is *eo ipso* the Angel of Revelation, the case of the mystical Sage and the case of the Prophet respectively exemplifying the same conjunction with the Angel.<sup>80</sup>

77. Cf. Duhem, IV, 399-400.

78. This *ta'wil* "leading back" the Intelligence to the Holy Spirit will also arouse some doubts: can the Holy Spirit, identical with Gabriel the Archangel, be only the Tenth Intelligence? Is he not rather the first of the Archangels, dominating the whole of the pleroma, identified, as in our *Mi'raj-Namah* (below, § 14), with the Archangel

Michael? Then too, as we have pointed out, all the Intelligences of the pleroma are "Active Intelligences" and, as such, also "Holy Spirits" (cf. our "Prolegomenes II," pp. 48 ff.).

79. Cf. Eugene Tisserant, tr. and ed., *Ascension d'Isaie*, pp. 14-15.

80. Cf. above, p. 75, n. 71.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

The Intelligence Holy Spirit is the Angel of Humanity in the philosophy of Ishraq—where too it is not without resemblances to the Virgin of Light of Manichaeism. In any case, it is the Angel who gives origin to our souls as minor divine "Words," and it represents the Angel whom, in the *Gospel According to the Hebrews*, Jesus calls "my mother the Holy Spirit."<sup>81</sup>

It is still too early to write the extensive book that a philosophy of the Angel Holy Spirit in this spiritual universe would demand. We shall here consider only his personal relation to the soul, his "child," as lived and experienced in our recitals, both Avicenna's and Suhrawardi's. The relation is comparable to that of each dyad *'Aql-Nafs*; or again, as the pilgrim learns upon reaching the mystical Sinai of the *Recital of Occidental Exile*, his own relation to the Angel is the same as that of the Angel to the Angel preceding him. In the case of either relationship, a problem arises. It has been found possible to say that the Angel "symbolizes the individuality of the relation between God and the soul."<sup>82</sup> But would the idea of this individuation and the necessity of its symbol command acceptance if the identical relation that a multitude of individuals of the *same* species, differing from one another only numerically, can have to the *same* center were felt to be sufficient and satisfactory? Far from it, the idea of this individuation *each* time supposes as it were a new center and a case of *species*. This is why the relation of the Active Intelligence to the multitude of souls that have emanated from it does not answer the question; it only raises it on a new plane, and in its turn postulates the advent of specific individuation. Question and answer no longer depend upon theoretical data. Hence they must be formulated on the basis of a concrete situation, such as that of our recitals. Some philosophers—Abu'l-Barakat, for example—have given their attention to this situation; they will help us to formulate its theoretical aspect,

An objection raised by Fakhraddin Razi might be taken as a purely theoretical formulation of the problem. "Either," he says, "the Active Intelligence is one, excluding multiplicity, or it comprises parts. In the first case, the soul, in joining itself to it in view of a single intellection, must necessarily intelligize all intelligibles. In the second case, if the soul joins itself to a certain part only, it necessarily follows that for each intellection that can arise for man there is a corresponding part in the Active Intelligence. But the intellections in respect to which man is in the state of potentiality are infinite. The Active Intelligence

81. Cf. James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 2 ff.

82. T. K. Cheyne, *The Origin and Religious Contents of the Psalter*, p. 335.

## Angelic Pedagogy and Individuation

must, then, contain infinite parts."<sup>83</sup> Aside from the objection's appearing to ignore the fact that the potential infinite is not the actual infinite, Fakhraddin Razi shuts himself in a wholly theoretical dilemma. And because the situation is artificially reduced to theoretical data, it allows no glimpse of a solution. The impasse to which it leads arises from the fact that the author refuses, so it seems, to distinguish ontologically between a state of conjunction (*ittisal*, such as will be the case with Hayy ibn Yaqzan's companion) and a state of unification (*ittihad*) fusing essences and persons. Razi's objection would be equally valid in the case where mystical conjunction with the supreme divinity is postulated and in the present case, where the *Imago mundi* proposes a conjunction with the Angel who is the Active Intelligence.

This difficulty presented in theoretical data will already have been partly met if we observe the *de facto* individuation of a relation that presupposes neither the splintering of one of the terms into infinite parts—as if we were dealing with a measurable magnitude—nor the increase of the other term to a totality beyond its scope. Abu'l-Barakat's reflections on the problem of the Active Intelligence and the angelological developments to which these reflections lead him also open to us a speculative field in which the dilemma in which Razi will shut himself disappears. Far more telling, however, both as a datum and a solution, is the experiential fact of the • encounter, of the face-to-face attested by our visionary recitals. An objection of the type of Razi's has never troubled any mystic nor invalidated his experience. Avicenna's visionary found himself in the presence of Hayy ibn Yaqzan; Suhrawardi's found himself face to face with the Angel on the mystical Sinai, with the purple-hued Angel (*'Aql-e sorkh*), etc. The commentators studiously explain that the figure encountered is the Active Intelligence; our recitals, however, attest an identification neither with the totality of intelligibles nor with a "part" of the Intelligence; they attest the mental vision of a figure possessing well-marked individual features, who is at once that Intelligence and yet different from it (the Sage of *Gabriel's Wing* at first speaks as if he were the Angel himself, then as if he were the Angel emitted before that Angel, as other visionaries in their theophanies encounter the "Angel of the Lord").

It would, then, be necessary to trace what psychic process culminates in this vision. The point to be noted seems to be the fact that the event postulates the simultaneous individuation of the soul in a state of vision and of the figure that presents itself to it in this vision. Precisely here the resources and antic-

83. Cf. *Kitab al-mabahith al-mashriqiya*, I, 137.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

ipations that are within reach of the theory of the individuation of Forms by matter are once and for all transcended. To trace the unfolding of the process at the conclusion of which the soul discovers itself to be isolated outside of the world to which it is a stranger, and at the same time to be in the company of one in whom it finds the representative of its true world, its "celestial Guide," we must fix our attention on the Image present to the soul from the beginning, the Image that makes it know the structure of the sacred world, of the angelic pleroma, and simultaneously reveals it to itself as made "in the image" of the beings of that pleroma and as ordained to those beings by reason of this homology. It is owing to this Image of itself, which shows it and reflects in it the relations that ordain and subordinate the beings of the pleroma to one another, that the human soul is capable of conceiving and realizing a wholly new situation corresponding to its quality of Stranger, this quality being precisely an individuation isolating it outside of the species that is strange to it.

What order governs this structure from the heights of the pleroma to the terrestrial level upon which the soul has been cast? In the pleroma, each Intelligence and each celestial Soul respectively constitute, as does the Intelligence from which they proceed, an individual entity that is itself its own species.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, too, the celestial Matter of the sphere that results from the "lower" self-intellection of the Intelligence and that is moved by the Soul engendered by the Thought of the same Angel—this celestial Matter is a specific matter; it differs with each heaven. Thus each triad constituted by the Archangel, his Soul, and their heaven forms as it were a complete universe apart from every other; its specificity corresponds to the degree of contemplative happiness of each Angel and to the particular motion that translates the ardent desire of each Soul. "Each is in the whole of the sphere of its heaven. . . ." When the series of Emanations has descended to the Tenth Intelligence, the Energy of being and

84. In the Avicennan angelology (as for St. Thomas), each angelic individuality forms a species by itself. For Suhrawardi, what distinguishes each angelic individuality is not a specific difference but a difference in intensity of light. It is true that Suhrawardi introduces these variations of intensity even into the category of substance (one soul can be "more intensely soul" than another). One may, then, ask if in fact the degree of intensity is not equivalent to a specific difference. The problem assumes great importance

in Sadra Shirazi. Yet the following consideration would always remain: since increase in intensity presents itself to the soul not simply as a possibility but as a goal, the individuality is not forever fixed in its species, even if the species be unique; instead, its "specification" rises in proportion to its "intensification" (cf. our "Prolegomenes II," p. 46, and, below, the question of the plurality of "different species of souls," treated by Abu'l-Barakat).

## Angelic Pedagogy and Individuation

of light shows exhaustion. The Angel's wing of light has its counterpart in the darkened wing from which proceeds elementary Matter, which is very inferior to the celestial Matter of the spheres, the latter being still in some sort "immaterial" in comparison with elementary Matter. Instead of an Intelligence and a Soul whose *individuality* would be identical with their *species* in accordance with the norm of the previous dyads of the pleroma, the Tenth Angel, our Active Intelligence, produces in their stead the multitude of human souls that in sum represent the Intelligence and the Soul that the Angel no longer had strength to bring to birth and that broke up into a multitude. Now, this multitude of souls is that of individualities that, unlike the single Soul of each heaven, differ from one another only *numerically* but are identical as to species.

There is, then, as it were a change in the idea and the status of the individuality, or, rather, such a hiatus that the notion of individuality appears equivocal. Here the individual is an individual among others of the same species; he is subordinated to the species; he may perhaps become the individual dominating the species, but how should he attain to the state of the individual being that is its own species, that realizes the fullness of its own archetype? This would be to attain to the angelic condition, at least to that of the *Animae coelestes*. Now, is it not again and again repeated precisely that the condition of the *anima humana* is analogous to theirs, and that its way toward perfection is to conduct itself in accordance with their example?<sup>85</sup> But how will it be possible for its relation to the Active Intelligence to exemplify, on the plane of the "terrestrial angel," the individuated relation of *each* celestial Soul to the spiritual Angel or Cherub from whom it emanates? This last relation is the relation of one alone with one alone, constituting a perfect dyad. This dyad can be exemplified ad infinitum,

85. Cf. above, p. 72, n. 59, where we quoted Leibniz's proposal to conceive the individuality of souls in accordance with the type of individuality defined in angelology. Here, as our context makes clear, the problem for us arises from the *experiential* spiritual fact attested by our recitals: the synchronism between the soul's awakening to itself and its meeting with its Guide or celestial Self, the *one-to-one* that goes beyond theoretical expectations. Other visionary recitals present similar cases of individualization, when, for example, it is no longer the destiny of men in general that concen-

trates the interest and hope, but the destiny of the individual at the end of his life, and hence the celestial ascent of the individual soul takes the place of the final cosmic dramaturgy. Indeed, the mystical ecstasy is experienced as an anticipation of the eschatology (cf. also below, § 14), as a metamorphosis announcing it. The pre-Islamic Iranian exemplifications have been rightly cited to define the archetype here; cf. Dibelius, *Der Hirt des Hermas*, p. 486; the (alchemical) celestial ascent of the Mage Ostanès, J. Bidez and F. Cumont, *Les Mages hellénisés*, II, 348.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

on condition that this relation be maintained. But how can the analogy of relation be preserved if the term that must correspond to the *Anima coelestis* represents not a single Soul but a multitude?

To be sure, the question could be avoided by many theoretical solutions or considerations in the light of which it would not even be posed. However, just as little as the question originates in theoretical data would such considerations suffice to account for the actually experienced fact of the vision and the meeting of the *one-to-one*. If this one-to-one depended on the general norm of individuation for individuals of the same species, the favor of this meeting would be the rightful due of each and all. If not, the state of isolation in which the one-to-one is produced postulates another norm of individuation than that which attributes the individuation of Forms to Matter.

According to this norm, when a corporeal receptacle has been made fit under the action of the celestial spheres, the Angel *Dator formarum* infuses into it a thinking soul, which then becomes numerically different from other souls. In short, the human soul receives its individuality only through the fact of its union with the body,<sup>86</sup> and this individuation is the "service" that the body renders the soul. But the Avicennan perspective itself leads to posing the question of the preservation of the soul's individuality after death. That, because of its epistemology,<sup>87</sup> it succeeds in making a favorable answer is true enough; but precisely then does it become urgent not to allow any ambiguity to rest on the meaning of the individuality destined to subsist post mortem. Now, in the Avicennan perspective itself, the future destiny of souls as *separate* substances depends upon the degree of illumination to which they will have attained on earth, upon the greater or less aptitude that they will have gained for turning with greater spontaneity, perfection, and constancy toward the illuminating Angel Intelligence. For there are also the souls of the nongnostics, which care nothing for the world of the archangelic Intelligences, have only a vague, hearsay knowledge of it, and never turn spontaneously, and always with great difficulty, toward the illumination of the Intelligence. On the other hand, among the gnostics, it is chiefly from the age of forty years, when the activity proper to the body begins to lessen, that a spiritual state to which the change resulting from death will cause neither privation nor harm can begin. As we advance in this perspective in which the conditions and the meaning of the

86. Cf. Gardet, *Pensee*, pp. 91 ff. Forms from Matter but in receiving them as

87. That is, because of the fact that the *intellectus possibilis* is "brought into act" by the Active Intelligence and that consequently knowledge does not consist in *abstracting* an *emanation* from the angelic Intelligence and that in this emanation dispensed by the Active Intelligence the human intellect already has a guarantee of its immortality.

## Angelic Pedagogy and Individuation

- V individual person and of personal survival are defined, it appears that we leave farther and farther behind the conditions that would have the soul owe its individuality to its union with a material body.

There is more yet. In Avicennan terms, is the human soul basically the Form (the entelechy) of the body, in the Peripatetic sense of the word?<sup>88</sup> As soon as we observe how and why, in Avicennan anthropology, the soul is already a separate Form, at least in the sense that it is called to become a pure Form stripped of all matter, two consequences follow: the first is that its union with the body does not form a unity indispensable to the human person. But then the famous principle of individuation by Matter retains at most only a retrospective value. The second is that a pure Form is necessarily unique in its species; whereupon it becomes necessary to conceive, for the future state of the *anima humana*, a principle of individuation similar to that of the angelic Forms. To be sure, it is clear that we must proceed with prudence here: "Many principles for individual differentiation of separate souls are conceivable, and it may even be that we do not know which is their true principle of differentiation, yet we are not thereby justified in affirming that the principle does not exist."<sup>89</sup>

That the theoretical data of the great didactic works foresee neither the question nor the answer clearly is not surprising. It is precisely because of this, **and** thanks to it, that we have the visionary recitals. The initiation that they propose, the pedagogy or the quest that they impose, already inaugurate the **work** described in the passage from the *Theology* of Aristotle that, with Avicenna's gloss on it, we quoted above (pp. 76-77): the Active Intelligence takes care of the soul, which is its child, in order to lead it to its *intellectivity* ('*aqliya*), its state of pure Intelligence. The corresponding terms for this expression in Persian are *fereshtagi*, *malaki*, "angelicity" (frequently employed in Ismailian texts). As we read in the *Mi'raj-Namah*, which undoubtedly is not by Avicenna but which nevertheless exudes a perfume of Avicennism, "the human being in the true sense is he who accedes to the Angel—that is, he in whom the angelic condition predominates and who steadily departs further and further from the demonic condition."<sup>90</sup>

The ideal is eminently in harmony with an anthropology that is only an aspect of a fundamental angelology. The point of departure for the angelic pedagogy is the virtual angelicity of the human soul. Its culmination will be the

88. Cf. Gardet's excellent remark, p. 90, n. 3. Institut Franco-Iranien, MS. No. 29, p. 18, 1. 12: "w mardum bahaqiqat an buwad ke

89. Gilson, "Les Sources greco-arabes de l'augustinisme avicennisant," p. 50. bamalak rasad ya'ni malakiash ghalib shawad w az devi dortar **uftad**."

90. Department of Iranology of the



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

perfect flowering of this angelic condition. If we then inquire into the individual differentiation of the soul that has reached this perfection, where shall we seek the solution if not first in the idea of specific individuation that the angelology itself proposes? Then it is not only the one-to-one of the visionary recitals that will reveal its condition, the very condition that satisfies the summons of the Angel inviting the adept to become his companion. It is perhaps also the survival of the individuality that takes on a magnificent and redoubtable aspect. For this survival of the gnostic soul cannot concern the human species as such, common to 'Amr and to Zayd, nor the individuality of the human Form as it results from the numerical individuation of their material bodies. This purely numerical individuality appears trifling compared to that which results from the pedagogy wrought by the Active Intelligence, and which, compared with the former, assumes the aspect of a superindividuality, that proposed by the Angel to the human soul that is still at the beginning of the Way. When the terrestrial human condition has been obliterated and the angelic condition predominates, it would be difficult to conceive that the individuality resulted from terrestrial matter or from union with that matter.

If the theoretical expositions are accepted, it must be admitted that at a given moment this matter played this role (cf. above). However, how far is it true to say that a pre-existence of the soul to its terrestrial body is absolutely inconceivable? Such a pre-existence is supposed both by the *Recital of the Bird* and by the celebrated *qasida* on the soul. On condition of not degrading them into allegories, we can apprehend in them what is not statable except in symbols, because the symbol is the only possible expression of the mystery. Doubtless Ismailian mythohistory, for example, knows more details of the condition that pre-existed, the cycle of our present humanity. But Avicenna composed no mythohistory; what notion he had of it, he has left only in a *ciphered* text.<sup>91</sup> This text does not cipher general data, rational patencies subject to discussion, but an intimately personal experience, the state to which he owed the sudden flowering of mental vision.

91. Suhrawardi's mystical recitals are also in this sense *ciphered texts*; they are intelligible only if the pre-existence of the soul is their key; but precisely this can be spoken of only in symbols. Thus it will happen that the same author, when expressing himself "openly," will take his stand against this pre-existence (cf. *Hikmat al-Ishraq*, § 211, p. 201 of our edition), to the great

surprise of his commentators, who will contest the "proofs" given and deny their validity (ibid., p. 203). In his turn Sadra Shirazi will discuss these "proofs" a little peevishly even, and will expressly conclude in favor of the soul's pre-existence, citing in his support, among other works, Avicenna's recitals and the *qasida*; cf. *Kitab al-Asfar al-arba'a*, p. 814.

## Angelic Pedagogy and Individuation

Then in the unit of time that contains this mental vision—while the soul has withdrawn "home"—the *Imago mundi* appears in a flash, reflected in the Image that the soul has of itself, and hence also reflecting that Image of the soul. In such an instant, it is a vision of fundamental angelology, with the fullness of a coherent whole, that presents itself to the adept of Hayy ibn Yaqzan. The vision is projected on the triple perspective of a mystical "Orient"; there are the Angels-Intelligences "whose beauty sets the beholder trembling with admiration" (*Kerubim, Angeli intellectuales*); there are the Angels-Souls of the heavens (*Angeli coelorum*); there are the "terrestrial angels." This Image, of course, does not result from any external perception or comparison. It is not so much the object of vision as the *organ* of vision; it is what *shows* the soul, *enables it to see*, the cosmos in which it is, and simultaneously what the soul is in this cosmos and what it is in itself. What it shows the soul is the same structure that is repeated at all degrees of the beings of the pleroma and finally in the soul itself and that, by repeating itself in the soul, in the constitution of its being, ordains it to this pleroma.

There is a relationship of subordination that, from degree to degree, gives coherence to the universal hierarchy of beings, both that of the angelic existences and that of the powers of the human soul. Each Intelligence holds the same relation to the Intelligence from which it proceeds as is held to it by the Intelligence that in turn proceeds from it, and the relation is repeated from degree to degree; each degree is in both a median and a mediating position and exemplifies a twofold relation to the degree that precedes, and the degree that follows it. Each Angel-Soul stands to the Angel-Intelligence in the relation described above (§7), which is repeated and exemplified with each dyad. Each Soul is at once turned toward the Angel and occupied with drawing its heaven into the motion of its desire. Finally, this relation of the celestial Soul to the Angel is exemplified in the human soul, which bears within it as it were the vestige of the Intelligence and the single Soul that the Tenth Intelligence had not the strength to bring to flower. These are the soul's two intellective powers (*intellectus contemplativus* and *intellectus practicus*),<sup>92</sup> those that the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* typifies as "terrestrial angels."

92. On these two powers of the soul, cf. Gilson, "Sources," pp. 57-63. These two powers or two faces of the soul "do not exactly correspond in Avicenna to the Aristotelian distinction between the practical and the theoretical intellects. . . . In Aristotle,

the practical reason has not the function of provoking laughter or blushing." What Avicenna defines is "*the reasonable soul* (not the intellect nor the reason) in its practical functions" (ibid., p. 57, n. 1).

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

For this reason, ch. 21 of our recital is particularly full of substance. Who are the terrestrial angels? Hayy ibn Yaqzan says simply: one group have their station on the right, those who know and order; the other group have their station on the left, those who act and obey.<sup>93</sup> Like the Angels of Jacob's vision, sometimes they come down to men, sometimes they mount to heaven. The text adds: it is said that among their number are those to whom the human being is entrusted and whom the Holy Book calls "Guardians and Noble Scribes" (Koran LXXXII : 10-11). But our Iranian commentator adds: in the two groups of terrestrial angels he sees precisely the two intellective powers of the soul. They are the two *faces* of the soul, which will also be typified in the figures of Salaman and Absal. This is why these two intellective powers also typify the soul's two tutelary angels: one is stationed on the right, the angel who contemplates and dictates; the other is stationed on the left, the angel who acts and to whom it falls to write.

The Image through which the soul knows itself, then, reflects for it the structure and relations of the angelic world. Hence it is true to say that in knowing itself the soul attains to the world of the Angel (cf. commentary, pp. 366-67), since it finds in itself the revelation of its own structure and of its belonging to this world. Its two intellective powers (theoretical and practical), its two "faces," typify the angel who contemplates and dictates and the angel who acts and writes. Their relation is analogous to the relation between each Angel-Soul and the Angel-Intelligence. Its totality, as a soul governing a body, is a dual totality: it has one face turned toward what is on high (contemplative intellect, the Angels who mount to heaven), the other turned toward the vital powers that it subordinates to itself (practical intellect, the Angels who descend to earth). And it is by mounting on high that the terrestrial angel who contemplates simultaneously sees and reflects, looks upon and is looked upon by, the Angel to whom he stands in the same relation as that borne to him by the other terrestrial angel, the one who acts; and this by reason of the universal

93. It is interesting to note in the *Ascension of Isaiah*, a Christian text pervaded by Gnosticism, a similar division of the angelic universe. In company with the glorious Angel who guides him, the ecstatic passes through the firmament (in which, to the end of time, is waged the angelic combat against Sammael and his legions; cf. the situation in the "clime of the demons of the soul" at the

entrance to the Orient, in *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*), and reaches the first heaven, where he sees a throne: to *right* and *left* of this throne are Angels, and those whose station is to the right have a greater glory and magnificence; their voice too is more powerful and magnificent; cf. R. H. Charles, tr., *The Ascension of Isaiah*, pp. 46, 58; also below; p. 359.

## Angelic Pedagogy and Individuation

hierarchy that in turn mutually unites and subordinates all forms and powers. It is, then, possible to say that the two intellective powers typify the two terrestrial angels, and thereby typify the celestial and terrestrial selves whose union forms the total self.<sup>94</sup> Each is thus the counterpart of the other.

All takes place as if, in the Image of the *dualitude* immanent in it, the soul perceived the dyadic bond that unites it to the Angel-Intelligence from whom it proceeds, of which it in turn forms the terrestrial counterpart and in respect to which it is as the angel who writes to the angel who dictates, or as the celestial Soul of desire toward the Angel whom it contemplates. For the contemplative intellect, which typifies the celestial self, is doubtless that one of the soul's two faces which is turned toward what is on high, but it belongs to an incarnate soul governing a body, and both faces together are but one human soul. By discovering, through its Image, what in it exemplifies the structure of the angelic pleroma, the soul learns to behave in accordance with its example, to establish their due order between its two powers, so that it comes to exist *ad imitationem Animae coelestis*, in imitation of the celestial Soul, which is the counterpart of the Angel-Cherub (as is shown by their names: Wajh al-Quds, Wajh al-'Izza, etc.). Then, in turning toward what is above, it is its Image that it sees, the being in whose image it is because it emanates from him, and who shows it its own Image.

Mystical psychology usually stresses the stages passed through by the soul, as a process accomplished within it—for example, the phase of isolation, the essential "monadization." Now, we have here placed in synchronism (above, § 2), as Event of our recitals, the soul's awakening to itself (the orientation of the contemplative intellect) and the mental visualization of the celestial Guide. This conscious face-to-face with the figure of the vision is accompanied by the feeling of a one-to-one. If the meaning of the Angel is the 'individuation of the relationship, this individuation necessarily individuates the two terms of the relationship. Feeling its condition of being a stranger, aspiring to its true world, to the being of whom it is the terrestrial counterpart, the soul finds

94. There will be relational homology between Hayy ibn Yaqzan and the soul in its contemplative function on the one side, and the contemplative and practical powers of the soul on the other. Transposed a tone lower, the dialogue could thus be interpreted as being held between the two "terrestrial angels," the contemplative intellect typify-

ing the role of Hayy ibn Yaqzan, as the *Nous* of Hermetism is at once the personal *Agathos Daimon* and a faculty of the soul; cf. further below, p. 152, n. 26; as to the homology of this structure with that of the Gnostic anthropology, cf. above, p. 21, n. 20, and below, p. 357, n. 1.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

itself isolated outside of its species, perhaps sole of its species precisely as are the *Animae coelestes* in respect to their Angel. The rapt discourse in dialogue pursued in this isolation supposes a unique relation to a unique figure. The twofold theophanic and pedagogic function of the Angel accomplishes this twofold individuation on the one side and on the other, on that of the Vision and on that of the visionary. This is why the idea of the perfect individuation of the soul can be asked of angelology, since it is angelology that also offers the schema in which individuation is equivalent to specification. It then becomes possible to verify the analogy that situates each celestial Soul toward each Angel as the soul of the adept is situated toward Hayy ibn Yaqzan (or toward the Angel of the Suhrawardian visions), who is the individuation of the Angel Active Intelligence—and this is the end toward which the angelic pedagogy tends.

Now, it is certain that these demands, elucidated from an experienced situation, will have their repercussion on theoretical schemata. If human souls, at least the souls of gnostics, are each in a specific relation toward the Active Intelligence, this reciprocally supposes something like a specified angelophany. It is this idea and this twofold demand that are answered to by the idea of the Perfect Nature (*al-Tiba al-tamm*), as we find it in the work of Suhrawardi,<sup>95</sup> and, before him, in that original thinker Abu'l-Barakat, who seems, on this decisive theme, to have had an aptitude for manifesting the preoccupations of a pluralistic and monadological philosophy in a world that a profound trend was drawing toward monism. The questions that Abu'l-Barakat asks himself proceed from propositions similar to those of the present investigation. For it seems that their development is spontaneous as soon as one pauses to meditate, in a serious spirit, on the fundamental datum constituted by the relation of the Active Intelligence to the soul and souls. What orients this development is the fact that, to be experienced as a real Event, the relation presupposes an individuation that must affect each of its terms. It is the experienced fact—the encounter with Hayy ibn Yaqzan, for example—that must be taken as point of departure. Otherwise, it will not be reached by theoretical reasoning; we have seen that the objection expressed by Fakhraddin Razi reached an impasse.

As for the data of the problem as Abu'l-Barakat well sees it, they come down to this: <sup>96</sup> are we to conceive human souls as being *one* in respect to *species*

95. The commentators have been sufficiently unaware of this problem to have been overcome by doubts at times and to have remained uncertain whether it was a question of the Intelligence *or* of the Perfect Nature; cf. our "Recit d'initiation," pp. 158 ff.

96. Cf. *'al-Kitabal-Mu'tabar, II* ("Meta-physics"), 381 ff.

## Angelic Pedagogy and Individuation

and quiddity and as differing from one another only by accidental states? Are we to conceive that every soul differs individually from every other soul in essence and in species? Are we to conceive that souls are grouped as it were by spiritual families constituting so many different *species* in respect to a common *genus*? The choice in favor of the unity of species has the suffrage of the majority of philosophers. The second hypothesis, that of the specific individuality of each soul, seems not to have been really clearly maintained by anyone. As for the third hypothesis, it seems to have the complete approval of Abu'l-Barakat, who is eminently attentive to the deep-seated differences between human souls, as manifested in their natures, their principles, their modes of being and acting. Hence he is not afraid to come into direct collision with the common opinion of philosophers, by refusing to admit that the Active Intelligence is the sole cause of the multitude of souls; the diversity between the latter is far too serious to allow of only a single existentiating cause. To account for this diversity, which ends in the constitution of *several species* of human souls, nothing less is requisite than the participation of *all* the celestial Souls, the Angels-Souls who move the spheres, whose dispositions and motions are so many factors necessary for the unfolding of this plurality. Only those who refuse to see the diversity of souls admit the Active Intelligence as sole cause.<sup>97</sup>

Our philosopher's pluralism does not remain satisfied even by this first rectification. To safeguard the specific plurality of souls, he considers it further necessary to distinguish between their existentiating and their perfecting cause, just as the father is other than the preceptor (*muallim*). To be sure, the difference in souls as to their substance, species, and fundamental nature postulates a diversity in their principles (*mabadi*) and their causes. But in addition, because of this very diversity, the spiritual pedagogy (*ta'lim*) that initiates the soul into itself cannot be limited to a single form or to the Active Intelligence alone. Thus some souls learn only from human masters; others have had human and superhuman guides; others have learned everything from invisible guides, known only to themselves.<sup>98</sup> . . .

This is why the ancient Sages, those who had the gnosis of direct vision (*ma'rifat al-mushdhada*), having been initiated into things that the sensible faculties do not perceive, taught that for each individual soul, or perhaps for a member of souls with the same nature and affinity, there is a being of the spiritual world who, throughout their existence, adopts a special solicitude and tenderness

97. Ibid., II, 394, and III ("Physics"), 152.

98. Ibid., II, 412.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

toward that soul or group of souls; it is he who initiates them into knowledge, protects, guides, defends, comforts them, brings them to final victory, and it is this being whom these Sages called the *Perfect Mature*. And it is this friend, this defender and protector, who in religious language is called the *Angela*.<sup>99</sup> The equivalence thus established gives the concept of the Angel all the force that, for the ancient Sages, was attached to the concept of Perfect Nature as the celestial entity responsible for the soul. The Perfect Nature assumes—and "individuates"—the role of the Active Intelligence.

Necessarily too, the person of this celestial Guide and friend, perfecting cause of the soul, again brings up the same questions as does the existentiating cause. It cannot be only one for all souls, for the same reason that makes it impossible for the Active Intelligence to be the one and only cause. But, then, has each soul its Angel? Is there one Angel for a family of souls? Or, on the contrary, are there perhaps several Angels for a single soul? Here learning cannot decide the question. For his part, Abu'l-Barakat is inclined, as in the preceding case, to admit that the affinity, the degree of evolution common to several souls, groups them in one *species* under the protection of the same Angel.<sup>100</sup> In following the road opened here by the same premises, the question had been raised whether there was really no other principle of individuation for the human soul except union with the body, and whether each individual soul was differentiated from other souls only numerically, because it belonged to the same human species as they. To this the remarkable pluralistic and monadistic sentiment of Abu'l-Barakat already brings an answer that testifies to a perfect consciousness of the essential differences that specify human souls into a plurality of species. The demand of angelology, which, by conferring the status of terrestrial angel on the soul, removes it from the jurisdiction of a pure anthropology, could, by reason of this very *fereshtagi*, have led our philosopher to the notion of a soul that is itself its own species, like the Angel who himself realizes his whole species, his own archetype. The concept of Perfect Nature implied this. Abu'l-Barakat prudently observed that learning gives us only **the** idea of the celestial spiritual master in general.

To decide the question in favor of an individuality of the soul that *each* time corresponds to a celestial archetype with which the soul is integrated to form a dual unity—this doubtless could not be an object of demonstration, but only of experience and vision. Such a vision would be close to the gnostic angelology

99. Ibid., II, 391, and cf. our study cited above, n. 95.

100. Ibid., III, 152-53.

## Angelic Pedagogy and Individuation

when it speaks of "Angels of whom we are portions," or gives the soul, a fallen angel, a higher Self, the angel who has remained in heaven, with whom the soul after death will share the mystery of syzygy in the pleroma.<sup>101</sup> Equally close are the visions of Hermes in the mysticism of Suhrawardi. A mysterious form of light manifests itself to Hermes; it projects and infuses gnosis into him, and answers his question: "I am thy Perfect Nature."<sup>102</sup> To it Hermes appeals for help when he is terrified by the perils glimpsed in a dramaturgy of ecstasy.<sup>103</sup> To it, again, Suhrawardi addresses one of his most moving psalms. To it are given the names sun, Angel of the philosopher, initiator into wisdom, director and inspirer.<sup>104</sup> It is the Guide, as is the Angel (al-Hadi) of the *Recital of Occidental Exile*, or the feminine angel Daena, who appears to the soul after death in the individual eschatology of Mazdaism and Manichaeism.<sup>106</sup> By these successive glimpses of the same figure we are, in fact, taken back to the Mazdean vision of the Fravarti as celestial Person, archetypal "I," primordial Self, tutelary angel of the soul of which she is the celestial counterpart. The cosmic dramaturgy can demand the descent of the Fravarti to earth; the dyad is not abolished, and it is the figure of Daena that then assumes this role, as the "celestial Soul on the road" (she who guides the human soul after death on the road to the Cinvat Bridge).

The situation of the Stranger imprisoned in the depths of the cosmic crypt, to whom his celestial Soul appears as the Angel who will guide him out of that inferno, clearly proves to be the fundamental situation described above (§2) as introduction to the dramaturgy of the Avicennan and Suhrawardian visionary recitals. To become conscious of this situation is, for the soul, to become the pure mirror in which the Image whose features it recognizes appears, and then to walk in company with the Angel or the King's Messenger, as our recitals repeat. Therein consists the angelic pedagogy that leads the soul back to its "Orient," and this is why we saw the recital of Tobias and the Angel as offering an exemplary case of our spiritual romances. To be sure, in order to *see* it thus, we must raise it to a level of "gnostic" truth with which current exegesis has hardly been concerned. Yet one orientalist, J. H. Moulton, successfully per-

101. Cf. above, p. 21, and Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpta*, tr. Casey, p. 83.

\* 102. Cf. our edition of the *Mutarahat* (*Opera metaphysica*, I), p. 464, and above, pp. 22-23, Poimandres' answer to Hermes and the "Shepherd's" to Hermas.

103. Cf. our edition of the *Talwihat* (*Opera metaphysica*, I), § 83, p. 108.

104. Cf. Pseudo-Majriti, *Ghayat al-Hakim*, ed. H. Ritter, p. 193, and our "Recit d'initiation," pp. 158 ff., 163 ff.

105. Cf. our "Recit d'initiation," pp. 183-84.



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

formed an apt *ta'wil* of the charming and edifying little book by transposing it into Zoroastrian terms—quite unforcedly, for the case of Tobias and his Angel shows many traces of the *Imago mundi* to which we ourselves have just been led back here.<sup>106</sup> For the Archangel Raphael happily takes the role of the Mazdean Fravarti in her tutelary responsibility and provident tenderness. This is not motivated in a learned exposition; it is pure event. The young Tobias must leave his country, journey "into the Orient"; he must go forth from his house and seek a companion, a guide. But as soon as he has actually *gone forth*, he no longer needs to seek: "And he went out and found Raphael, the Angel, standing before him." 107

We may examine, we may meditate more deeply upon, the principle of individuation that individualizes the "one-to-one"; no theoretical schema will provide the necessary motivation for an event actually experienced, any more than it will invalidate it by a tenable objection. It is not objects or relations between objects that are to be discussed. What a soul *really* sees is visible only to it; and souls are distinguished from one another precisely by their mode of perception and their ability to perceive. A striking, a truly exemplary case of what we have sought to indicate here is recounted in the *Acts of Peter*, a collection in which, as in some others, precious vestiges of Gnostic spirituality and its Docetism have been preserved for us. Here, then, the Apostle Peter evokes the event of the Transfiguration. Of this event, which was visible only to some and, even then, not to their bodily eyes, he can say but one thing: *Talem eum vidi qualem capere potui* (I saw him as I was able to receive him). Then his discourse becomes urgent: "Perceive in your mind that which ye see not with your eyes." The assembly being in prayer, a brilliant *light* appears, not like the light of day but ineffable, *invisible*, indescribable. And the bright light enters the eyes of widows who were blind and who have just attained faith, and this light, which *enables seeing, makes them seeing*. Each is asked what she has seen: some have seen a boy, others a youth, others an old man.<sup>108</sup> Each can say in her turn: *Talem eum vidi qualem capere potui*. So too Tobias saw Raphael, the Angel, "standing before him"; so did a Suhrawardi see the

106. We refer to Moulton's felicitous initiative (in *Early Zoroastrianism*, pp. 332 ff.), at the same time dissociating ourselves from the tendency to abolish the particular situation of the Book of Tobit by typological or sociological reductions that have nothing to do with a true *ta'wil*; cf.

Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Religion des Judentums im spathelknistischen Zeitalter*, ed. H. Gressmann, p. 494.

107. Tobit v:4, in Charles, *Apocrypha*, I, 214.

108. *Acts of Peter*, xx-xxi; James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 321-23.

## The Number of the Celestial Spheres

Angel of the mystical Sinai; so an Avicenna saw a Hayy ibn Yaqzan. From simple mental vision to the ravishment of ecstasy there are many degrees. Each time, the soul has attained, or is on the way to attaining, its state of perfect individuation. It would suffice to repeat here what our Iranian commentator on *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* says in another connection: "Whoever has had this experience will understand what I mean" (cf. tr., p. 375).

### 9. *The Number of the Celestial Spheres*

The question, it appears, no longer directly concerns the connections between angelology and anthropology, which so far have been chiefly analyzed and which finally concentrated about the figure of the Self, of the transcendent celestial Person to whom the soul must find access, since that is equivalent to the flowering of its own eternity. Our new theme appears primarily to derive only from celestial physics and pure astronomy. And yet we already know that the secret of celestial physics is not different from that which sets the mystic's soul in motion. This secret starts him on the "pilgrimage into the Orient," which is the quest of his Self, of the person of the Angel, and which at the same time cannot succeed unless the Angel is its Guide. Celestial physics and astronomy define the stages of the itinerary, and not without some variants in the material data; traces of this are discernible in the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* and its Persian commentary. Now, the mystical pilgrimage progresses by virtue of a transmutation of these data into symbols, a transmutation that realizes progressive interiorization of the cosmos, emergence from the cosmic crypt. Finally, in these connections between angelology and celestial physics lies one of the points that determine the different destinies in store for Iranian Avicennism and Latin Avicennism. Hence it is not unimportant to indicate what it is that causes the hesitations of Avicennism in the matter of fixing the number of the Intelligences and of the spheres that these have respectively emanated.

That the problems are interconnected has been pointed out by Nasir Tusi. The problems are four in number, and concern: (1) the plurality of the higher bodies; (2) the plurality of their moving Souls; (3) the plurality of the objects of their desire (*ma'shuqat*)—that is, their Intelligences; (4) their essential differences and their common modalities.<sup>109</sup> It is not these four problems as such that require analysis here, but their connection and its consequences.

109. Cf. his commentary on the *Isharat*, III, 56.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

The first problem has to do with the astronomical data from which the schema of the angelic hierarchies was to be deduced. To understand the terms in which the problem is stated, let us first of all fix the concept of the total or enveloping sphere, as it had gained acceptance in order to "save phenomena." To each heavenly body was attributed a sphere encompassing the sum of the orbs from whose motion the total motion of the heavenly body, as described by its trajectory, was to result. This decomposition appeared necessary in order to explain the differences of the heavenly body's motion in longitude and latitude, accession and recession, swiftness and slowness, distance from and proximity to the earth. Of these spheres, the Peripatetics admitted eight, enveloping one another, homocentric, all having as center the center of the universe—that is, the center of the earth. Seven of these spheres were attributed to the planets; the eighth, enveloping the Whole (*al-muhit bi'l-kull*), was the Sphere of the Fixed Stars. The "Moderns"—that is, the followers of Ptolemy—added a ninth, starless sphere, which communicated the diurnal motion to the whole.

Such in broad outline are the data of the problem. As we see, it involves a number of speculative presuppositions that are of major interest, and whose rivalry is identical with the history of astronomy down to the sixteenth century. Their antagonism is to be ascribed partly to the philosophical demands of a celestial physics, partly to the preoccupations of an astronomical theory tending essentially to "save phenomena." The philosophers firmly maintained that the tasks of celestial physics were not the concern of mere astronomers. In Peripatetic physics the very nature of the *quinta essentia*, or celestial essence (the substance from which the orbs and the heavenly bodies are made), which is neither subject to generation nor corruptible, demanded that every body formed of this essence should move with a circular and uniform motion.<sup>110</sup> Now, the only uniform rotations are those whose center is the center of the universe. What was required, then, was celestial motions capable of being decomposed into uniform rotations of spheres, and that these spheres should be homocentric to the unmoving earth. It was for the astronomer to solve the problem under these conditions, to determine the number of spheres and the motion of each. In any case, the Peripatetic theory of natural motions could not admit that there were celestial bodies that did not turn uniformly **about the** center of their orb, nor that this center was other than **the** center

110. Cf. Duhem, *Le Systeme du monde*, II, 59-60  
(to whom we owe data essential for what follows).

## The Number of the Celestial Spheres

of the world, nor that in this center there was no fixed body, nor that there were eccentrics and epicycles in the heavens.<sup>111</sup>

From the time of Aristotle, astronomy regarded the motions of the planets in their irregularity as compound motions that must be resolved into uniform circular motions.<sup>112</sup> For each heavenly body it demanded a number of spheres equal to the number of pure circular motions that it considered necessary to explain the body's apparent motion. Now, each Mover can communicate to the same Matter only one kind of motion. Finally, since each motion must proceed from a motionless Mover, and since all eternal motion must proceed from an eternal Mover, it is necessary to suppose as causes of the motions of the spheres as many motionless and eternal substances as there are spheres set in motion: each sphere moves with a motion proper to it and communicated to it by the incorporeal essence, the Intelligence that governs it.<sup>113</sup>

Thus the famous astronomer Eudoxus of Cnidus, the first author to elaborate a detailed theory of the spheres based on accurate observations, had outlined a system of twenty-seven spheres, twenty-six of them for the planets. His successors ran into difficulties: additions and corrections proved to be necessary. Aristotle arrived at a total of fifty-five spheres, or fifty-six including the Orb of the Fixed Stars, which presupposed an equal number of Intelligences—that is, of divinities, incorporeal and motionless essences—from which the motion of each of the spheres respectively proceeded.<sup>114</sup> This is the number to which Avicenna refers (cf. below, p. 99). It did not fail to occasion hesitations and variants, traces of which appear in the manuscripts of our Persian commentary on the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*.<sup>115</sup>

To turn now to the case of the "Moderns"—that is, of the disciples of Ptolemy. The Oriental astronomers—Farghani and Battani,<sup>116</sup> for example—

111. Cf. *ibid.*, II, 65-66. The Neoplatonist Simplicius will attempt a compromise: every circular motion takes place about a center; each has its own center; the center of all the celestial bodies taken together coincides with the center of the universe.

112. Cf. Eduard Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen*, vol. II, pt. 2, pp. 347 ff.

113. *Ibid.*, vol. II, pt. 2, pp. 348-49 (ref. to *Physics*, Book viii, and *Metaphysics*, Book xii).

114. *Ibid.*, vol. II, pt. 2, p. 355.

115. Cf. *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*,

ch. 16, text and commentary: the "cities" of each of the regions of heaven or celestial spheres.

116. Abu'l-'Abbas Farghani (Alfraganus of the Latins), Iranian astronomer of Transoxiana (ninth century); cf. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s.v., and Brockelmann, *Geschichte*, I, 221; Abu 'Abdallah Muhammad al-Battani (Albategnius), native of Harran (ninth century), whose family had professed the religion of the Sabians; cf. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s.v., and Brockelmann, I, 222.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

were no more concerned than had been the Ptolemy of the *Almagest* (The Great Syntax) to define the concept of the celestial spheres; they confined themselves to considering them under "their mathematical aspect of ideal circles representing the motions of the heavenly bodies." 117 It was Ibn al-Haitham<sup>118</sup> who first introduced into pure astronomical considerations the (Aristotelian) concept of solid spheres,<sup>119</sup> whose definition was later universally accepted: "The celestial sphere [falak] is a completely spherical body, limited by two spherical surfaces having the same center"—that is, the center of the world. Now, each of these orbs (delimited by the two *homocentric* spherical surfaces) contains an *eccentric* sphere, surrounded by two surfaces having the same center as the eccentric sphere itself; this is called the *deferent orb*. Between the two parallel surfaces that delimit this orb—that is, in the thickness of the deferent orb—is lodged the *epicyclic* sphere, that which bears the body of the planet, which is as it were enchased in it. In its turn this epicyclic sphere moves circularly about its own center and about two particular poles.<sup>120</sup> We need not remind the reader that the theory of eccentrics and epicycles destroyed the entire celestial physics of Aristotle. But we must not lose sight of the fact that Ibn al-Haitham simply borrowed his system in its entirety from Ptolemy's *Hypotheses planetarum*, in the sense that in this work Ptolemy too had recourse to a celestial physics deduced from the nature of the substance that forms the heavens; in the last analysis, then, he only substituted his own *physics* for that of Aristotle's *De caelo*.<sup>121</sup>

We are thus led back to the confrontation of two systems of celestial physics.

117. Cf. C. A. Nallino, *Raccolta di scritti editi e inediti*, ed. M. Nallino, V, 77-78.

118. The celebrated philosopher, physicist, astronomer, and mathematician (the Alhazen of the Latins), surnamed *Ptolemaeus secundus*; cf. Brockelmann, I, 617 ff., and Suppl., I, 851 ff.

119. Cf. Nallino, V, 78, and Duhem, II, 121 ff.

120. Cf. Duhem, II, 124 ff., quoting extracts from Ibn al-Haitham's *Summary of Astronomy*; see *ibid.*, II, 83 and 90-93, details of the construction of figures for Ptolemy's system with diversification of the number of spheres for each of the planets.

121. *Ibid.*, II, 87-88. "Ptolemy's ether

is now exactly like the fifth essence defined by Aristotle; we no longer find in it the ether considered in the *Syntax*, the fluid that offered no resistance to the motion of the heavenly bodies. The ether henceforth considered by Ptolemy will, then, be divided, like Aristotle's fifth essence, into solid bodies circumscribed and separated from one another by spherical surfaces; with the difference that Ptolemy will no longer make it a condition that each of these surfaces shall be concentric with the earth." The second book of the *Hypotheses* is extant, of course, only in an Arabic version whose authenticity is considered to be guaranteed by a passage of Simplicius that it reproduces word for word (*ibid.*, II, 98).

## The Number of the Celestial Spheres

They are two physics of the same type, as far as their mode of deduction is concerned. Their premises and demands are, however, irreconcilable, the one developing a system of spheres homocentric with the center of the earth, the other a system of eccentrics and epicycles. This irreconcilability Nasir-addin Tusi could not fail to note. On either side, however, precisely in so far as celestial physics is concerned, the problems of angelology arise in similar terms, with the same urgency and the same difficulties. The differentiation whose effect is most immediately perceptible in the schematism of pure angelology follows from the number of the enveloping or encompassing spheres, mentioned above.

Aristotle and Ptolemy himself, in the *Almagest*, had accepted the number of *eight* spheres—that is, seven for the planets and an eighth for the fixed stars.<sup>122</sup> However, Aristotle did not know the motion of the precession of the equinoxes; the "fixed stars" being considered really motionless, the Eighth Sphere was made responsible for the apparent diurnal motion of the celestial vault from east to west, a motion that the Eighth Sphere imparted to all the others. But Ptolemy, accepting the motion of precession by which the fixed stars have a slow and continuous increase in longitude, was obliged, at least implicitly, to attribute to the Sphere of the Fixed Stars two motions in opposite directions: one the diurnal motion from east to west, the other from west to east. The contradiction could not but be felt. Hence, in the *Hypotheses* Ptolemy already proposed the existence of a *ninth* sphere; and immediately after him the Alexandrians accepted it, without further reference to the spheres that lay below these two and to which it had previously been sought to attribute the diurnal motions of the respective "wandering stars."<sup>123</sup>

Among the Orientals, if Farghani still reckoned only eight spheres, the Brothers of Purity accepted nine,<sup>124</sup> and Ibn al-Haitham, in giving a place in his compendium to the Ninth Sphere without stars, moved by the diurnal motion and communicating this motion to the entire universe, was only conforming to what had already been admitted by the Alexandrians and the Neoplatonist Simplicius.<sup>125</sup> This sphere was variously termed the Universal,

122. Nallino, V, 64 ff.

123. Cf. Duhem, II, 90, 124-25.

124. Ibid., II, 207-08.

125. Cf. the remarkable passage from Simplicius translated by Duhem (II, 202-04) in which the Ninth Heaven is no longer regarded as a pure abstraction. "Simplicius

surrounds the Eighth Sphere, constellated by the fixed stars, with a ninth sphere without stars; this Ninth Sphere of the Fixed Stars adds the motion of precession, which it transmits to all the lower spheres" (ibid., II, 204). Cf. above, p. 62, n. 33, on Avicenna's *Risala fi'l-Malaika*.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

the Highest, the Enveloping Sphere, the Sphere of Spheres (*falak al-aflak*), etc., and philosophers in general accepted it, except, of course, Averroes and, with him, in Spain, those who supported the restoration of pure Peripateticism undertaken by al-Bitruji (Alpetragius).<sup>126</sup> On the other hand, Suhrawardi and the philosophers of Ishraq, in Iran, could not be satisfied with a single sphere for the multitude of fixed stars; through the "dimensions" of their new angelology they foreshadowed the limitless spaces of an astronomy that would shatter the traditional schemata, but that nevertheless had not depopulated the infinite spaces of their celestial "presences."

Such, in very broad outline, were the data present to the mind of Nasiraddin Tusi when he gave a place in his commentary on the *Isharat* to the problem of the number of the Intelligences—that is, of the objects of desire, the "Beloveds" (*ma'shuqat*), of the celestial Souls moving the spheres. In fact, homocentric structure and Ptolemaic structure of the cosmos equally legitimately provided the astronomical data from which the schema of the angelic hierarchies was to be deduced, since the *interpretatio mundi* poses the same principle a priori: the several heavens being of different natures, as is shown by the difference in their motions, the Intelligences must be several so that a single Cause shall give rise to a single effect.

If the Intelligences are "objects of desire" for the celestial Souls, the diversity in the motions of their heavens shows the diversity of their causes and the diversity of their desires. Although the heavens have something in common, neither the object of this desire nor the desire itself can be the same for all the celestial Souls. Each of the heavens must, then, have a Soul proper to it (cf. above, § 7), assigned to move it and it alone by its power, and to each Soul individually there must correspond an Intelligence that is the object of its particular desire and toward which it tends by putting its heaven into motion.<sup>127</sup> The data of celestial physics and astronomy, whose schemata we have briefly analyzed, enter in precisely here. *Either*, retaining only the concept of the major or enveloping sphere, only one Intelligence could be reckoned for each of the moving heavenly bodies that gave its name to the sum of its orbs, as well as for each of the higher spheres—that is, the Heaven of the Fixed Stars and the Ninth Sphere. *Or* each of the spheres into the motion of which it appeared necessary to decompose the total motion of the heavenly body must have as its principle a particular Intelligence, the number of separate Intelli-

126. Cf. Nallino, V, 72-77; Duhem, II, pp. 260-61.  
130-39, 166 ff.; Quadri, *La Philosophic arabe*,

127. Cf. Duhem, IV, 450-51.

## The Number of the Celestial Spheres

gences corresponding to the number of these different motions. The choice—or reconciliation—between these two hypotheses presents itself in terms of celestial physics, both Peripatetic and Ptolemaic.

Such is the *status quaestionis* on which Avicenna reflects in a rich page of the *Kitab al-Shifa'*.<sup>128</sup> It may be, he says, that the planetary circles are of such a nature that the several circles of a given planet should admit as principle of their motion a certain virtue (or energy) emanating from the planet itself. If this is so, the number of separate Intelligences will not depend upon the number of different motions: it will but little surpass the number of the planets. After the First Principle, there will be only ten Intelligences.<sup>129</sup> But if this is not so, if it is true that each of the circles moves toward the Intelligences, being itself the judge of its motion, if the same is true of each of the planets, then the separate Intelligences will be more numerous. On the admission of the *Primus Magister* (Aristotle), it would result from this that there are some fifty Intelligences or even more.—Whichever hypothesis is adopted, two things are certain. (1) To "each heaven there corresponds an Intelligence that is its proper and proximate principle; it is a principle separate from matter; it is to the Soul of the heaven what the Active Intelligence is to our souls."<sup>130</sup> (2) This Active Intelligence, the Intelligence that will manifest itself to the visionary by individuating itself under the figure of Hayy ibn Yaqzan, is the last of this hierarchy of ten or fifty, and it emanates from the Intelligence of the Heaven of the Moon.

Does Avicenna decide between the two systems? The passage cited from the *Kitab al-Shifa'* does not settle the question. Was there, in fact, a dilemma forcing an exclusive choice? The two systems of angelology are not heterogeneous. Does not the *Risala fl'l-Mala'ika* tell us of a multitude of Angels and Souls surrounding each of the *Kerubim* and each of the Souls whose eternal generation is described? It is quite conceivable that for each of the major or enveloping spheres bearing the name of the heavenly body there is a corresponding Angel-Prince (as in III Enoch) attended by a plurality of Intelligences corresponding to the plurality of orbs requisite for the motion of the heavenly body, the orbs that the commentary on the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* will designate as the "cities" of each heaven. On the other hand, it is in regard to

128. Cf. *ibid.*, IV, 451, and *Kitab al-Shifa'*, II, 615-16.

129. Reckoning as the tenth our Active Intelligence proceeding from the Intelligence

of the Heaven of the Moon; cf. further below.

130. Duhem, IV, 451.



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

the number of these Angels-Princes that hesitations will appear. Once the existence of the Ninth Sphere was admitted, the question could still arise if the First Caused, the First Intelligence, was the Cause of this First Heaven; and, admitting that it was, was it its Mover—that is, the object of the desire of the First Soul; or did it assume this role toward the entire universe as *Primum Movens*, while the "object of desire" proper to the First Soul was the second of the *Kerubim*?

Avicenna, it seems, leaves us in doubt. Having already established the existence of a "certain number" of Intelligences different from one another in personal essence, he confines himself to concluding: "There is no doubt that the First Caused either forms part of their series or is in their intelligible space." A double hypothesis, to which we owe this mention of intelligible space (*al-hayyiz al-'aqli*) here and which Nasir Tusi elucidates as follows: "There is no doubt that this First Caused either is in their series—that is, is the Mover of a heaven that is the first of the heavens—or, if it is not the Mover of a heaven, is in their intelligible space—that is, shares with them in the same condition of being separate and exempt from what is only potential."<sup>131</sup>

Each of these hypotheses alters the physiognomy of the pleroma. The first hypothesis, recognizing in the First Caused the Mover of the First Heaven, tends to the schema of the Decad, which finally prevailed.<sup>132</sup> The First Intelligence originates the Second Intelligence (that of the Heaven of the Fixed Stars) and the Soul and the body of the First Heaven (or Ninth, counting from the earth). From heaven to heaven there is a descent to the Ninth Intelligence, which originates the Tenth, which is our Active Intelligence. The second hypothesis exalts the First Intelligence above the entire pleroma; in this case, unless the Active Intelligence is identified with that of the Heaven of the Moon, we arrive at a schema of eleven Intelligences. It appears to be most unusual; yet it is the one clearly set forth in the commentary on the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*.<sup>133</sup>

Many other questions will remain. In the first place, would it not be possible to conceive in a single being a pluralization of "dimensions" in such a sense that the famous principle *ex uno non fit nisi unum* should cease to hold,

131. Commentary on the *Isharat*, III, 4 (*Opera metaphysica*, II, 264-65).  
56.

132. Cf., for example, Suhrawardi, "Symbol of Faith of the Philosophers," art.

133. Cf. ch. 16 and pp. 369-71, n. 21; above, p. 62, n. 33.

## Latin Avicennism and Iranian Avicennism

and such that a simultaneous procession of several beings from the First Being would then be conceivable?<sup>134</sup> Then too, does the procession of Intelligences cease with the last heaven? Does it not begin beyond the First Heaven? Are not the Intelligences infinitely more numerous than the number of the spheres?<sup>135</sup> In short, as Nasir Tusi remarks, the Avicennan doctrine merely decides that there is simultaneity between the order of the Intelligences and the order of the celestial spheres, and that the number of the former is not less than the number of the latter. To state an opinion beyond that is to exceed the limitations of human intelligence.<sup>136</sup> As Abu'l-Barakat further says: "All this is a general exposition in regard to knowledge of Spirits, Angels, and active substances transcending sensible bodies. As to investigating details, that is a task for mystical and intuitive knowledge, not for demonstrative knowledge."<sup>137</sup>

On the efforts of this mystical and intuitive knowledge, its failures and its ever-renewed hopes, some light will be thrown by a brief comparison between the very different destinies of Latin and Iranian Avicennism.

### 10. *Latin Avicennism and Iranian Avicennism*

In his monumental study Pierre Duhem had already shown that the astronomical revolution brought about by the adoption of the Copernican theory presupposed a theological revolution.<sup>138</sup> Now, the criticisms and sarcasms of William of Auvergne will show us that what so troubled official theology was essentially the whole theory of Intelligences and its conclusion: the doctrine of the Active Intelligence as illuminator of men's souls—in short, all angelology. Theology would combat all emanationism, claim the creative act as a prerogative of God alone, end the human soul's soliloquy with the Angel Active Intelligence. But the whole of cosmology was bound up with angelology. To reject the latter was to shake the foundations of the former. Now, this

134. We have already indicated (above, p. 56, n. 17) that such was the solution sought by Nasir Tusi, following Suhrawardi. Our general exposition of the philosophy of Ishraq will give us the occasion to return to this question in detail.

135. An intuition that was the beginning of Suhrawardi's conversion to the

Orient of Pure Lights; cf. our edition of the *Hikmat al-Ishraq*, § 166, pp. 156 ff. (cf. further below, p. 120, n. 178).

136. Commentary on the *Isharat*, III, 66.

137. *Mu'tabar*, III, 168.

138. Cf. *Le Systeme du monde*, IV, 317 ff.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

was precisely what perfectly served the interests of the Copernican revolution. So that we witness an alliance between Christian theology and positive science to the end of annihilating the prerogatives of the Angel and of the world of the Angel in the demiurgy of the cosmos. After that, the angelic world will no longer be necessary by metaphysical necessity; it will be a sort of luxury in the Creation, its existence will be more or less probable. To be sure, the rights of strict monotheism will have been vindicated, but at the same time a new situation will have been created for man in the cosmos, a situation that will have deplorable consequences for one of the allies. The heavens will have been "laicized," depopulated of their angelic presences. The earth, become a planet like the other planets, will no longer be under the heavens but in the open sky. Who would now be interested in the "orientation" that Hayy ibn Yaqzan, for example, teaches? Yet the *Orient* toward which he orients has not ceased to be sought more or less obscurely by mankind. This is why we indicated earlier that, to perform the *ta'wil* of the text of the recitals, they must themselves be rediscovered as a *ta'wil* of the soul. To this end, a comparison between the different destinies undergone by Avicennism in the Orient, especially in Iran, and in the Latin Occident can instruct us in regard to its role as *exegesis* of the soul.

One of the many great results that we owe to the profound researches of Etienne Gilson is his clarification of the real extent of Avicennan influence on Christian thought in the Middle Ages. The alliance between a theological thought inspired by Augustine, and an Avicennan thought passing through a Christian *ta'wil*, determines what Gilson has thematized as "Avicennizing Augustinism." Yet it was among the theologians influenced by Avicenna that the harshest critics of the master's thought were to arise. But beside this milieu of theologians in which Avicenna is drawn into the paths of Christian orthodoxy and amended in its sense, we can discern another spiritual milieu, whose contours are still indeterminate, in which the influence of the Iranian philosopher was experienced more profoundly and where a thought is built up that is not only Avicennizing but "Avicennism." It is this thought that Father Roland de Vaux proposes to designate in its own right as "Latin Avicennism," to distinguish it from Avicennizing Augustinism. By considering the intentions of these two schools and their implementation, we find the physiognomy of Avicennism in the Occident becoming clearer: in particular, it is by meditating on the reasons that could not but finally make Latin Avicennism unassimilable to the great currents of Scholasticism that we can best understand its different

## Latin Avicennism and Iranian Avicennism

destiny in comparison with Iranian Avicennism. We are aware that this is a major theme of comparative research, which would require a large volume, if not several. The time for that has not yet come—far from it. Many manuscripts or lithographs of our philosophers down to the school of Mir Damad and even down to our day remain to be read. What we shall attempt here is a very brief sketch, in the first place because the results obtained on the subject of Latin Avicennism are still little known in the Orient. In the second place because, our visionary recitals having led us to emphasize the angelological experience, it is likewise from the point of view of angelology, as Duhem has already indicated, that the difference will be most perceptible.

In very broad outline, we can distinguish between the two principal Latin interpretations of Avicennism as follows: to begin with, the Augustinian interpretation transfers to God "in person" the prerogatives and the illuminative function of the Active Intelligence. If the reader will bear in mind the equivalences previously cited here, by which our philosophers "led back" the Active Intelligence to the person of the Archangel Gabriel identified with the Holy Spirit, he will easily see that on this point Christian orthodoxy could have, if not full consciousness, at least the suspicion of being once more confronted with certain Oriental "heresies" that were combated under other forms in the earliest Christian centuries and all of which had a decided flavor of Gnosticism. Then too this elimination of the prerogatives of the Archangel Holy Spirit and Active Intelligence had as premise or as corollary the rejection of the Avicennan cosmogony as essentially bound up with its angelology—that is, the rejection of the idea of the celestial hierarchies as mediators of the Creation. Genuine Avicennism, then, could only emerge from this interpretation disfigured. On the other hand, it is these two great themes that *pure Avicennism* will undertake to valorize, by that very fact delimiting as it were a zone of autonomous thought irreducible to a spiritual milieu whose demands ran counter to such a valorization.<sup>139</sup>

It was by pursuing fragmentary clues that the indications revealing the Avicennan ferment in an Augustinian thought were discovered and recomposed into a whole: "The critique of medieval Augustinism by St. Thomas supposed the existence of a school whose doctrine combined, in varying proportions, the dominant influence of St. Augustine with the Neoplatonism of Avicenna."<sup>140</sup> Whence the expression "Avicennizing Augustinism," coined to designate the

139. Cf. Roland de Vaux, *Notes et XII-XIII siècles*, pp. 9-15.  
*Textes sur l'Avicennisme latin aux confins des*

140. Gilson, "Sources," p. 103.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

tendency of the Augustinian theologians who had to some extent undergone the influence of Avicenna; even those who at first raised objections to the use of this new designation could propose none more fit for the purpose. Whether the object was an Augustinian interpretation of Avicennism or an Avicennan interpretation of Augustinism, the task was not easy. What was required, in all but name, was a *ta'wil* whose operation would be comparable to the extremely subtle technique that our philosophers—Avicennans, Ishraqi, or Ismailians—learned to use in order to gain a more or less recognized place in Islam.

The process<sup>141</sup> of the Augustinian interpretation shows that the rejection of the cosmogony and of the theory of the Intelligences is inseparable from a deformation of the doctrine of the Active Intelligence. This is because, in fact, "noetics is only a particular case of cosmology."<sup>142</sup> The situation, then, proves to have a twofold aspect: on the one hand, the fundamental angelology of Avicennism is rejected; on the other, the notion of a purely receptive and potential human intellect, in respect to an illumination that will confer knowledge of intelligibles on it from without, is retained. Now, if speculation continues to admit that the Active Intelligence cannot, properly speaking, be a part or a faculty of the human soul, and at the same time refuses the Averroistic solution, nothing remains but to transfer to God the illuminating function of the Active Intelligence.<sup>143</sup> We find a perfect type of Avicennizing Augustinism in Roger Bacon. To be sure, he systematically confuses the notion of God as primary source of all illuminations with what the theologians of his time called the Active Intelligence, but this in no way hinders him from openly invoking the sponsorship of Avicenna, whom he puts far above Averroes and whom he considers the most authoritative interpreter of Aristotle.<sup>144</sup>

In short, the representatives of Avicennizing Augustinism could not be better defined than in the following terms: "They are the theologians who, under the influence of Avicenna, borrow the terminology of Aristotle to formulate the Augustinian theory of illumination."<sup>145</sup> And in its turn the complete misunderstanding that is the point of departure for the operation could not be dissipated in clearer terms than these: St. Augustine had never taught that the

141. Cf. Gilson, "Pourquoi saint Thomas a critiqué saint Augustin," p. 52.

142. Ibid., p. 52.

143. But the path to this extreme solution is marked by numerous gradations; thus, the doctrine of the plurality of Active

Intelligences in Jean de La Rochelle (cf. *ibid.*, p. 87) is not without resemblances to the problem as posed by Abu'l-Barakat (above, pp. 88 ff.).

144. Ibid., p. 105.

145. Ibid., p. 110.

## Latin Avicennism and Iranian Avicennism

**illuminating** God was our Active Intelligence, for the very good reason that **he** knew nothing of the problem, as he knew nothing of the terminology and **the** schema of the Intelligences (*'Uqul*). There was, then, justification for **freeing** St. Augustine from this compromising situation, for denying that the illuminating God assumed the role of the Active Intelligence—the representation of which derived from Aristotle interpreted by Avicenna—in short, there were very good reasons for denying that the Augustinian illumination **was** the same as Avicennizing Augustinism.<sup>146</sup>

Yet another aspect helps to define the great misunderstanding: the Augustinian doctrine of illumination bears upon the truth of judgments, whereas illumination according to Avicenna (as according to Suhrawardi) confers on **the** human intellect intelligible Forms, hence concepts (it does not simply confer them from without; it is itself conferred by the Angel, it is contact **with** the Angel, *ittisal*). In short, "by virtue of their common Neoplatonism, **the** illumination-concept of Avicenna sought to combine with the illumination-thought of St. Augustine."<sup>147</sup> Of their union was born the bastard doctrine of God Active Intelligence. "Bastard," for was it possible "to extract from the Augustinian solution to the problem of truth an answer to the Aristotelian problem of abstraction"? As Gilson says, the attempt will be made until the Thomist analysis "restores to divine Truth its illuminating function and leaves to the human intellect its function of abstraction." But between the two moments, that in which the bastard doctrine had arisen and that of the Thomist restoration, it is the properly Avicennan angelology that will have been entirely lost.

According to Avicennan doctrine, the human intellect does not abstract Forms; it can only prepare itself, make itself fit, by perception of the sensible, for the Angel to illuminate the intelligible Form upon it. This illumination is, then, an emanation coming from the Angel, a presence of the Angel; it is not an abstraction performed by the human intellect. It is this relation that makes possible a direct intuition of the angelic operation, already supernatural as such, in the soul. No sooner is the Angel's intervention replaced by abstraction by the intellect than direct, immediate contact with the "celestial" world of the Angel is broken off. Thereafter there is a "nature," and hence a natural knowledge that, having been thus thrown back upon itself from the outset, is already no longer "naturally" mystical knowledge. Now, such was the meaning of angelology, a meaning that made noetics a case of cosmology, for the latter

146. Ibid., p. 118.

147. Gilson, "Sources," p. 107.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

was already only an aspect of angelology. St. Thomas was squarely in the line of anti-Avicennism. Even among the representatives of Avicennizing Augustinism, hostility to the doctrines of pure Avicennism essentially tends to the destruction of angelology. The most significant opponent in this sense was William of Auvergne. All his critiques constitute as it were so many articles of a model program for a future comparative investigation: on the one side, Latin Avicennism representing something of a challenge if it refuses to accept compromises and deformations; on the other, Iranian Avicennism receiving, through the Ishraq of Suhrawardi, a new development of its angelology.

William of Auvergne's objections<sup>148</sup> show that he is determined to wage out-and-out war against Avicenna's influence, against the Avicennan world of the Angel, more precisely perhaps against the Gnostic reminiscences felt to be present in the Avicennan angelology. The principal counts of the indictment can be grouped around five points of irreducible opposition:

(1) There is nothing surprising in the fact that William of Auvergne, a Christian theologian, totally rejects the Avicennan idea of eternal and necessary Emanation—that is, rejects in principle any identification between Knowing and Creating, and hence all necessity in the divine understanding. His idea of Creation postulates that the will of God is eternal but free. There are divine decisions that are eternal, but their effects are not necessarily so. These are all points irreconcilable with the thought of our philosophers. Furthermore, everything created and all creatures are subject to the divine free will: "The Aristotelian and Avicennan notion of natures operating in virtue of an inner necessity and according to the law of their essences is thus banished from philosophy."<sup>149</sup> The Avicennan cosmos, then, is denied in its very principle. The consequences follow of themselves: the multiplication of celestial beings and of their hierarchies no longer has any "necessary" *raison d'être*.

(2) These separate Intelligences, the Archangels *Kerubim* composing the pleroma of the *Ibda'*, are in the Avicennan view eternally established in being, by virtue of an inner necessity that their own being receives from the First Being; and the latter could not fail to establish their being, nor delay their promotion to being, without ceasing to be the necessary Being. They are the necessary mediators between the world of being that is eternally in the imper-

148. Cf. de Vaux, *Notes*, pp. 22-38; Gilson, "Pourquoi," pp. 49-51; id., *La Philosophie au Moyen Age*, pp. 419 ff. William of Auvergne (1180-1249), born at Auril-

lac, was professor of theology at Paris, then consecrated bishop of Paris in 1228.

149. Gilson, *Philosophie*, p. 420.

## Latin Avicennism and Iranian Avicennism

ative ('*alam al-Amr*) and the world of creatural being ('*alam al-Khalq*), both as mediately creative substances—each bringing to being that which follows it—and as moving and final causes acting on the Soul that respectively proceeds from each of them. And so it continues, down to our Active Intelligence, down to the world of the human soul structured by its twofold intellectual power in the image of the celestial pleroma.—All this is now done away with. There are neither mediations nor degrees in Creation. God alone is cause, freely and immediately, of the totality of beings. The vision of a pleroma of beings of light, deriving their dignity (*martaba*) and their mediatory and creative function from the inner necessity of their being, is replaced by the vision that preserves only a hierarchy caused by the free will of the Creator and levels every other elevation in the interest of a universal and uniform service of the Omnipotent. Here again we see the assertion of a monotheistic idea that could not but react in this way in the presence of any cosmos hierarchized in accordance with the Neoplatonic or Gnostic type.

This is why the position of our philosophers was no more comfortable in Islam, as we shall again have occasion to note. However, it remains possible that here a sort of ambivalence of absolute divine transcendence appears. Either it makes its overwhelming power felt, it volatilizes the Created and allows each creature to subsist only in a face-to-face that engulfs it in a timid adoration of the Omnipotent. Or else all the consequences of the ineffableness and impredicableness of transcendent divinity will be described (the King withdrawn into his extreme solitude, in the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, ch. 23). In this case, it will be necessary to walk the narrow ridge between agnosticism and anthropomorphism (*ta'till* and *tashbih*), between negation and the negation of negation, on the trail of theophanies. Ismailian theosophy will succeed in this by an extraordinary equilibrium. The figure of the Angel then remains invested with its theophanic function: at the summit, the very same figure will appear to esoteric thought as *Deus determinate*.<sup>150</sup> Here, on the contrary, in anti-Avicennism, the question is decided in the sense of and in favor of exoteric theology.

(3) The second hierarchy, that of the celestial Souls (the *Angeli coelorum*, *Fereshtagan-e asmani*, proceeding from the *Angeli intellectuals*, *Fereshtagan-e*

150. On the narrow ridge followed by impossibility of affirming or denying), cf. *ta'wil* (spiritual exegesis) as by *tawhid* (attestation of the One) between the two extremes of dogmatic distress (the twofold our *Etude preliminaire*, pp. 69 ff.; on the primordial Archangel as *Deus determinates*, *ibid.*, pp. 112 ff.



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

*ruhani*), will be no less radically banished but still more severely treated. The feeling of the divine distance to which the idea of the celestial hierarchies is the response, the motion of the heavens explained as produced by the desire and nostalgia of their Souls, everything in which we found the possibility of seeing an Avicennan "romanticism"—all this leaves our intrepid theologian from Auvergne completely indifferent. The existence of the celestial Souls might still be admitted, provided that they had nothing to do with human souls and human affairs (now *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* recalls the connection and kinship between *Anima coelestis* and *anima humana*). According to William, the great danger is to hold that the Angels can intervene in the course of human events, whether directly or through the heavenly bodies whose government the astronomers attribute to them.<sup>151</sup>

To lessen this danger, to steel human souls against the seduction of the celestial Souls, the surest means is to make a mock of the Avicennan conception. Here, to ridicule these Souls that draw the Avicennan heavens into a motion of desire and nostalgia too heedless of the Law of strict monotheism, our Christian theologian finds quips and sarcasms worthy of those that the verve of Voltaire will in its turn invent against Christianity. There is a sort of cyclical recurrence in the laws of the genre. Are not these poor souls bound to a condition worse than that of the horse or ass condemned to turn a mill? And what good does it do us? If they at least turned *our* mills . . . Finally, if it is for love of their Angels that the Souls thus move their heavens, is it not well known that the lover aspires to make himself like the beloved? Now, the Intelligences are motionless; the celestial Souls would, then, do better to stand still.<sup>152</sup> These anti-Avicennan sarcasms perhaps add a note of gaiety to the history of philosophy; they also testify to a rather strange experience of love, one that in any case is foreign to the Sufi idea of the amorous quest of the soul, ever journeying, ever anxious, on the road of its pilgrimage "in imitation of the celestial Soul."

(4) The objections provoked by an irreconcilable hostility to the Avicennan angelology culminate when the idea of the Active Intelligence is approached. They proceed from the previous premises: for a strictly monotheistic vision

151. "Illud autem non leve periculum habet, videlicet sentire de animabus illis quod gubernatrices sunt rerum inferiorum et maxime humanarum et hominum, similiter et quod effectrices sint sive per se sive per corpora sua eventuum humanorum legumque

perfectarum vel aliarum, quae astronomi posuerunt eis" (*De universo*, 1, 80S<sup>b</sup>-06a, cited in de Vaux, *Notes*, p. 24, n. 4).

152. Cf. Gilson, "Pourquoi," pp. 50-51.

## Latin Avicennism and Iranian Avicennism

of the world, it is inconceivable and inadmissible that the human soul should be produced by an Angel, and find its end, its happiness, and its glory in that Angel.<sup>153</sup> Here the disagreement and the misunderstanding were equally hopeless. To arrive at the fundamental issues, any comparative study would here have to cite and co-ordinate a number of spiritual perspectives. It must never be forgotten that, when our philosophers speak of the "Active Intelligence," they at the same time think of the "Holy Spirit," further identified with the Archangel Gabriel in his annunciatory role.<sup>154</sup> Doubtless the Christian theologian was not wrong in detecting a certain Gnostic "deviation," but this must not make us lose sight of the perspective upon which the spirituality proper to our philosophers opens. The Angel is the necessary mediator between God and the Prophet, as the Prophet is the mediator between the Angels and the Sages, as the latter are mediators between the Prophet and the mass of mankind. But the Active Intelligence, Archangel Gabriel and Holy Spirit, is equally the Angel of Knowledge and the Angel of Revelation. It is under its influence that the gnostic progresses on the way, and finally, by uniting with it, the mystical Sage is put in the same situation as the Prophet: he too can in his turn, and each time, become the "seal of prophecy."<sup>155</sup>

All the personal piety that the vision of the Active Intelligence can inspire in one of our mystical philosophers is prefigured in the expectation of this extreme case. Already in the *Recital of the Bird*, the journey in company with the King's Messenger—as if raising Tobias' pilgrimage with the Angel to the plane of *Haqiqat*—is only a progress toward this end, which Absal will attain. For this mystical salvation, the Angel fulfills his soteriological function. Obviously, neither Avicennan nor Ishraqi metaphysics gives room for a Christology; but in return they invest the Holy Spirit with the theophanic and soteri-

153. "Scito igitur quia hujusmodi philosophi . . . intelligentiam istam posuerunt unam numero uncam separatam . . . et vocaverunt eam intelligentiam agentem, et dixerunt eam esse creatricem et perfectricem omnium animarum humanarum, et quoniam perfecta communicatio animarum nostrarum ad ipsam est eis voluntas perfectionis, et hoc est dicere beatitudo et gloria. Ex quibus omnibus consequens est evidenter ipsam adorandam animabus humanis, atque colendam cultu supremo honoris et habendum Deum verum ab hominibus" (*De anima*, n. 112<sup>b</sup>, cited in de Vaux, *Motes*, p. 26, n. 1).

154. Cf. Suhrawardi, "Symbol of Faith of the Philosophers," art. 4 (p. 265 of our edition), where the identification of the Angel of Knowledge, *Dator formarum*, with the Angel of Revelation, Gabriel or Holy Spirit, is immediately followed by the Koranic verse of Annunciation: "I am the messenger of thy Lord, sent to bestow on thee a holy son" (XIX:19).

155. Cf. the esoteric interpretation of the *shaqq al-qamar* (splitting of the moon) mentioned above; see our "Prolegomenes II," pp. 53-54.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

riological function,<sup>156</sup> and it is also an indication of profound significance if an entire tradition of ancient Oriental Christianity, instead of accepting the orthodox concept of the Incarnation, dwelt on the figure of Christos-Angelos: the Angel Christ manifesting himself as a celestial light upon the man Jesus on the *dies natalis* of his baptism, and attesting his divine *adoption*.<sup>157</sup> In short, if Christian theology felt it necessary to make over to God the role of the Active Intelligence, it is for reasons no less profound that the Avicennan or Suhrawardian mystical philosophy confers on the Angel Holy Spirit or Active Intelligence what orthodox Christian theology could attribute to God alone. A whole phenomenology of the "motivations" of spirituality would need to be traced on this point. We ask to be excused for not undertaking it here.

(5) Basically, the rejection of the Active Intelligence as an Angel who should be the personal divinity of the human soul is also bound up with a certain conception of the soul. We noted above how the Image that the soul bears in its very being illuminates, both in height and depth, the psychic space in which the soul feels fitted to assume toward the Active Intelligence, or, rather, toward the Figure individuating it, the role and the situation of each celestial Soul toward its Intelligence.

This Image is essentially that of the two intellective powers that are the two *faces* of the soul. This conception too William of Auvergne vehemently rejects, raging against the "imbeciles" (*sic*) who admit such a duality—and who, by the way, are respectable theologians under the impression that it is an Augustinian thesis.<sup>158</sup>

We already know to what he refers: the distinction between *intellectus contemplativus* (*kharad-e dana*) and *intellectus practicus* (*kharad-e kdr-kun*), both typified in Hayy Ibn Yaqzan's discourse as "terrestrial angels" or tutelary angels of the soul, mounting and descending a mystical Jacob's ladder. It has been aptly observed that as two faces of the soul these two intellects do not exactly correspond in Avicenna to the Aristotelian distinction between the theoretical and practical intellects. In fact, *intellectus* is employed in the sense of

156. The theophanic function that, in Ismailian theosophy, is that of the primordial Archangel as *Deus revelatus seu determinatus*, while the soteriological function is the work of the tenth, as demiurge of our cosmos, Anthropos or spiritual Adam (*Adam ruhani*).

157. Cf. Hans Joachim Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judentums*,

pp. 71-75, 80 ff.

158. "*Et hanc imbecillitatem memini me audisse etiam his verbis videlicet quoniam alia est vis intellectiva quae divinis ac coelestibus se intermittit solummodo, alia quae de rebus humanis et terrenis*" (*De anima*, n. 216<sup>b</sup>, cited in de Vaux, *Notes*, p. 39, n. 4).

## Latin Avicennism and Iranian Avicennism

*anima*, and the practical intellect (also called *intellectus activus*) defines not the intellect (still less the *reason*) but the thinking soul in its practical and active function<sup>159</sup>—that is, as occupied with governing the body and its vital powers (cf. below, the figure of Salaman). We have seen that in the universal hierarchy of powers and faculties the practical intellect is to the contemplative intellect as the angel of the left to the angel of the right, that is, as the celestial Soul to the Intelligence or, again, as the contemplative intellect itself to the Active Intelligence. By meditating on this twofold presence within it, and on the analogies thereby proclaimed, the soul discovers and experiences the relation of its contemplative intellect to the Active Intelligence—i.e., its own relation to Hayy ibn Yaqzan, the homology of its situation to that of each *Nafs* toward its *'Aql*. This will be the theme of the *Recital of Salaman and Absal*. In the measure in which the soul thus behaves toward the Angel (that is, in which it "journeys with him"), Absal (i.e., *intellectus contemplativus*) typifies its "degree of advancement in mystical gnosis" (*'erfan*).

This raises the all-important question. The contemplative-intellect is the organ of immortality in the soul; upon it the Angel *acts*, by irradiating the Forms of knowledge of which this intellect is the receptacle; toward the Angel it turns each time that it "calls to memory" any of these Forms. The alarm of a William of Auvergne finally comes down to this: if it is as pure intellect united with the Angel that the soul finds its individuality, then what is the situation in respect to its individuation—that is, to its personal survival? For we have been taught that the principle of individuation is matter, and, after death, what remains of the dispositions acquired by the soul in consequence of its union with the material body. Now, this is the whole of the question that we earlier attempted (§ 8) to raise in entirely different terms, such as the Avicennan view appears to impose. For if the *'aqliya* of the soul is equivalent to its "angelicity," which is the end of the angelic pedagogy, must not its individuation, then, be conceived after the same type as the specific individuality of the Angel? This is to return to the angelological premises of Avicennism; but it is just these premises that, taken as a whole, even the Avicennizing Augustinism of William of Auvergne could not but reject! On the other hand, it is these premises that what has rightly been called *Latin Avicennism* without qualification—that is, *pure Avicennism*—attempted to valorize. In the end, we shall see the latter more or less clearly maintain this idea of a soul whose immortality is conditioned by its practice of gnosis (*'erfan*)—by its familiar "companionship" with the Angel,

159. Cf. Gilson, "Sources," p. 57, n. I; cf. above, p. 85, n. 92.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

in Hayy ibn Yaqzan's terms—an idea difficult to reconcile with the canonical status conferred on the soul in official Christian theology.

The texts so far published, which make it possible to discern the broad outlines of this Latin Avicennism in the pure state, are three in number. (1) A treatise *De anima* attributed to the Archdeacon of Toledo, Dominicus Gundisalinus (between 1126 and 1150), celebrated translator of Avicenna.<sup>160</sup> Gilson holds that this treatise is a source of the current of Avicennizing Augustinism. Father de Vaux prefers to see in it the prototype of pure Avicennism, while admitting that it could well be a source of both. (2) A treatise that is included in the Latin edition of Avicenna printed at Venice in 1508. It is called *De intelligentiis* in that volume; but its proper title, as supplied from the best manuscript, is *De causis primis et secundis et de fluxu qui consequitur eas*.<sup>161</sup> Its presence in manuscripts containing genuine works accounts for its attribution to Avicenna, an attribution the impossibility of which is evident from its content. In fact, the treatise is an example of "the synthesis between Avicenna and Christian Neoplatonism."<sup>162</sup> (3) A curious and extremely interesting little anonymous treatise, discovered and published by M. T. d'Alverny;<sup>163</sup> it shows traces of Gnostic influences and, in general, represents a sort of *Mi'raj-Namah*, in which an 'arif has no difficulty in finding his familiar orientation.

Of course, these three treatises represent various shades of opinion. It is not our intention to analyze them here, but to note their convergence in regard to the principal themes to which William of Auvergne expresses determined opposition, whereas our anonymous treatises maintain as faithful an Avicennism as possible. Here again, angelology seems to be the deciding factor from first to last. And the decision is reached through an alliance, and a sort of reciprocal recognition, between the Avicennan doctrine of Intelligences and the angelology of Dionysius the Areopagite, which, in Christianity, is the source of all mystical speculation on the celestial hierarchies. As soon as the Pseudo-Avicenna attributed to the First Intelligence and the Intelligences that proceed from it the characters that Dionysius the Areopagite confers on the Angels, there is identification of the celestial persons. The Angels of Christian Revelation are visible through the Avicennan Intelligences, as, in Avicenna himself, the

160. Gilson, "Sources," pp. 79-92; de by a Christian source."

Vaux, pp. 141-46, casting doubt on the attribution of the treatise, which in any case is one "in which an authentic exposition of Avicennan psychology is completed by a mystical theory of knowledge, inspired

161. Cf. de Vaux, pp. 63-80.

162. Gilson, "Sources," pp. 97-102.

163. Cf. "Les Pérégrinations de Tame dans l'autre monde d'après un anonyme de la fin du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle."

## Latin Avicennism and Iranian Avicennism

*Kerubim* are visible through them, and the Holy Spirit or Archangel Gabriel through the Active Intelligence.

In this unadulterated Latin Avicennism, the orthodox idea of Creation having been set aside, the process of eternal Emanation presents itself as a revelation and manifestation of the divine Ideas or intelligible reasons of creatures; this revelation is realized in the state of *theophanies* in the angelic Intelligences or as sensible effects in Matter.<sup>164</sup> The First Intelligence or First Caused originates two beings, by a process that, as in Avicenna, is successively repeated down to the Active Intelligence; and since in the Intelligences intelligible forms are themselves Intelligences, we may say that the theophanies are reduced to angelophanies, a situation that finally determines the sense of the gnosiology. The valorization of the Avicennan schema rests on this: the Active Intelligence being, like all the other Intelligences, an Angel of the Dionysian hierarchy, our Christian Avicennan sees no harm in—and no objection to—subordinating the human being to the celestial hierarchy. Furthermore, if he sees no harm in it, this is not in consequence of a rational deliberation upon magnitudes comparable as objects, but is rather owing to so profound a necessity and experience of the soul that, in experiencing his relation with the divine as a relation with the Angel, our Avicennan puts himself with perfect indifference in opposition to the express teaching of St. Augustine, who rejects the idea of any intermediary between God and man.<sup>165</sup>

The doctrine of celestial Souls, Angels of the second Avicennan hierarchy, is also maintained and valorized. The First Soul, or Soul of the First Sphere, knows the First Intelligence, the First Angel, and loves him. This love in it is the principle of its desire to move, and it perpetually moves its heaven. In it, as in all the Souls that follow it, and on down to human souls, the faculty of

164. Cf. de Vaux, p. 73; Gilson, "Sources," p. 95.

165. Cf. Gilson, "Sources," p. 96.—However, the absolute opposition between Avicennism and Augustinism here does not operate on a plane common to both. We cannot suppose them together confronted by the question: "Is there an intermediary between God and man?" as if the question had the same meaning and content for the Augustinian and for the Avicennan. It is their very concepts of God and of the relation to the divine that differ. Hence we should find our-

selves in a completely ambiguous situation. It follows that a preliminary phenomenological analysis is requisite: how, to an Avicennan consciousness, can the divinity appear such that the relation to it is experienced as individuated in the relation to the Angel; and how, by a total and undifferentiated mode of perception, does an Augustinian consciousness abolish all pluralization and, having done so, conceive a series of practical—not to say political—exigencies, for which the Avicennan *'arif* could have felt nothing but aversion? Cf. further below.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

apprehending and desiring and the faculty of moving are separate, whereas in the case of the pure Intelligences life coincides with will. It does not suffice for the Soul to *think* particular things in order to possess them; its desire marks the distance between its will and their being, and its desire causes them to be.<sup>166</sup> Finally, the Pseudo-Avicenna's treatise propounds a doctrine of the intellect, and of the illumination of the human soul through the Active Intelligence, that is in perfect agreement with the Avicennan doctrine.<sup>167</sup>

Thus we again come to a fundamental aspect of Avicennism, and one that motivates its rejection by the orthodox doctors: the affirmation of the Active Intelligence as illuminator of the soul, and, as a corollary, that of the immortality of the soul acquired by its union with the Active Intelligence. The first thing to be noted is this: when the doctrine of the Active Intelligence, and, with it, the whole system of angelology, prove to be bound up with the idea of a divine transcendence entirely beyond the grasp of human intelligence,<sup>168</sup> it does not appear necessary to conclude that we find ourselves placed solely on the plane of natural knowledge and that no mystical penetration is initiated. In the Avicennan and post-Avicennan schema of the world, the world of the Angel is in its own right above the *physis*, is supernature, just as, in proportion to its "angelicity" (*fereshtagi*), the human soul is already superhuman. We mentioned above that, from the viewpoint of Ismailian thought, just where *exoteric* theology holds that there is penetration of the divine mystery, it necessarily encounters a *Deus determinatus* who is precisely the First Archangel or First Intelligence.<sup>169</sup> Is not the idea of the divine unknowableness, then, itself a "revelation" dispensed by the Angel? And when the latter, in accordance with his essential function, formulates the invitation "If thou wilt, follow me toward Him"—does not this imply that the mystical ascent has already begun? Supernature is equivalent to Hayy ibn Yaqzan's "leaving the Occident," and this exodus cannot be performed without the Angel's guidance. The soteriological aspect of the illuminating function of the Angel who is Active Intelligence and Holy Spirit

166. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 97, summary of a beautiful doctrine that, through influences from Dionysius and Johannes Scotus Erigena, reflects representations similar to those of Avicenna and Suhrawardi.

167. "Dicamus ergo quod intellectus in potentia est ipse tenebre: cui cum appropinquat intelligentia agens et coniungitur ei modo sue conjunctionis, illuminat ipsum ut, secundum quantitatem sui luminis recipiat

formam ab intelligentia agente in qua est formarum multitudo, et per receptionem ejus incipiat esse in effectu qui prius fuerit in potentia" (cited in Gilson, "Sources," p. 100; cf. de Vaux, text p. 130).

168. "Principium ergo principiorum superat omnem cogitationem et intellectum . . ." (cited in de Vaux, pp. 139-40).

169. Cf. above, p. 107, n. 150.

## Latin Avicennism and Iranian Avicennism

corresponds to this exodus out of *nature*—that is, out of the *Occident*—and it would be difficult not to regard the experience of this exodus as belonging to mysticism.

It will, then, be possible for the consequences implied by one or another of Avicenna's doctrines to be experienced as entirely different from those that non-Avicennans or anti-Avicennans draw from the same doctrines. Even such a treatise as the *De anima* attributed to Gundissalinus—whose Avicennism is less pronounced than that of the *De causis primis et secundis* (= *De intelligentiis*)—begins by admitting two theses apparently unacceptable to the Christian theologians: it admits, first, that the Angels or Intelligences have at least an *instrumental* role in the creation of human souls,<sup>170</sup> and, secondly, it admits the post-mortem loss of the dispositions acquired by the soul during its union with the body, so that, in the eyes of the orthodox Christian theologian, the idea of personal survival appears definitively endangered. Now, here Christian Avicennism does no more than apply the theory of the two faces of the soul or of the two intellective powers, mentioned above. Far from the idea of personal survival being thereby endangered, it is, on the contrary, in proportion to his ability to turn toward the Active Intelligence and to unite with it that, according to Avicennan doctrine, the human being decides his destiny and his posthumous becoming. To turn toward the Active Intelligence (to journey with Hayy ibn Yaqzan) is the preparatory act, and the only act, incumbent upon the contemplative intellect; hence precisely the contemplative intellect is the organ of immortality in the human soul, the "terrestrial angel" or virtual angel whom the Active Intelligence can, to just this extent, bring *into act*.

This is why there is neither paradox nor metaphysical improbability in saying that, the more it plunges into the sensible, the more our soul approaches the intelligible, since it is on the occasion of its perception of single things that the Intelligence irradiates upon it the pure form of intelligible light. There appears to be no need to oppose this, as an inconsistency, to Platonism, which admitted a simple "excitation" on the part of the sensible, provoking the intellect to remember the knowledge that the Ideas had originally caused in our soul. For the fact is that, in our philosophers, the Platonic Ideas have given place to angelology, and perhaps the entire difference lies in this. In Suhrawardian terms, each sensible thing or species is the "theurgy" of its

170. "Hoc autem quod philosophi animas non a deo sed ab angelis creari probant, sane potest intelligi, scilicet non dei ministerio sed angelorum" (cited in de Vaux, p. 146, n. 2).



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

Angel (or of its *rabb al-nu'*); the sensible species does not divert from the Angel but leads to the "place" of the encounter, on condition that the soul seeks the encounter.

For there are various ways of turning toward the sensible. There is one that, simultaneously and as such, turns toward the Angel. What follows is the transmutation of the sensible into symbols, the constitution of the '*alam al-mithdl*'—in short, the very vision of our visionary recitals. And this is "to journey with the Angel." There is another that in equal degree turns away from the Angel: it is the case discussed by Hayy ibn Yaqzan, that in which the soul stoops to serve as a mount for its evil companions. The forms that such souls receive are impoverished and fugitive vestiges. For the soul, they are neither that knowledge of itself which opens knowledge of the Angel nor that ascent toward the Orient which the commentator on our recitals explains. As to the *intellectus practicus*, it is not the organ of immortality. It is the "angel of the left side," who writes under the dictation of the contemplative intellect; it acts on the vital powers, in such a way that they can serve for the pilgrimage into the Orient. At death, the *intellectus practicus* has completed its mission. This is why it is true to say that the soul then "separates" from it.

What, then, will become of the soul if it has not exercised its *intellectus contemplativus*, if it has not made itself fit to be the companion of the Angel in its *Mi'raj* after death? The answer to this must be given by the entire Avicennan or Suhrawardian eschatology. The result and the stake may appear unacceptable to any doctrine that regards the immortality of the soul as a natural status, with only the reservation of deciding whether a given soul will "deserve" a happy immortality or the condition of the damned. In fact, the outlook and the stake are perhaps even more serious. It may befall a soul to "die" as a soul can die, by falling below itself, below its condition of a human soul: by actualizing in itself its bestial and demonic virtuality. This is its hell, the hell that it carries in itself—just as its bliss is elevation above itself, flowering of its angelic virtuality.<sup>171</sup> Personal survival cannot then be thought of as purely and simply prolonging the status of the human condition, the "acquired dispositions." The latter doubtless concern what we call the "personality." But *khodi-e khod*, the selfhood of the self, the *essential person*, in its posthumous becoming and in its immortality perhaps immeasurably transcends the "personality" of so-and-so son of so-and-so.

171. The glosses on the *Theology* of Aristotle, mentioned above (§ 5), and Suhrawardi's *Hikmat al-Ishraq*, pt. 2, book v, should be compared here.

## Latin Avicennism and Iranian Avicennism

These are but brief indications marking the path of our philosophers, which leaves far behind and transcends the dilemma in which there was a tendency to shut their problem of personal survival. They would need to be corroborated by many post-Avicennan texts (Ishraqi or 'Erfani), which would disclose that Iranian Avicennism and "pure" Latin Avicennism were linked by an affinity because of which the latter was ideologically and historically unable to propagate itself in medieval Latin Scholasticism.<sup>172</sup> No more did the Avicennan angelology allow itself to be shut in a dilemma offering only the choice between monotheism and polytheism,<sup>173</sup> even if matters could assume this appearance in the eyes of orthodox doctors in both Christendom and Islam.

If, then, it is true to say that the Avicennan noetics is only a particular case of cosmology, it is so inasmuch as both are, in their turn, only an aspect of angelology. And if they are, it is because both the cosmic process and the process of knowledge mark the soteriological function of the Angel, inasmuch as each Angel draws to himself the loving Soul that has issued from him, and inasmuch as the Active Intelligence draws from the "Occident" to the "Orient" the souls that have issued from it and that turn to it. It is just this that makes Knowledge a *gnosis*, and the latter the fruit of an angelic pedagogy. We should perhaps have to turn to heterodox medieval currents more or less tinged with Manichaeism in order to find an equally clear sense of this angelology and of its necessity.<sup>174</sup> *Salvation* through this *gnosis* presents itself here neither as the consequence of a divine incarnation in the earthly and historical person of a redeemer nor as the consequence of a prophetic message instituting the religious Law and dictating a pact of obedience to men. There is, rather, in the

172. "Sola est ergo intelligencia que ex omnibus viribus suis in purgata anima post mortem remanet, si forte in ea se ante mortem iugiter exercet. Nam si in corpore posita intellectum contemplativum non habuit, profecto quia in morte intellectum activum deserit, cum neutro recedens in tenebris tabescit. . . . Et ideo anima fit immortalis per intelligenciam eternitatis" (Gundissalinus, *De anima*, ed. de Vaux, *Notes*, p. 173; cf. p. 167, ll. 27-31, and p. 169, ll. 21-26). This condition that Latin Avicennism lays upon survival, which is a conquest, is as foreign to the "canonical" status of the soul regarded as immortal by nature as it is in harmony with the profound

thought of pure Avicennism when the latter proposes to each adept (*'arif*), as ideal of perfection and bliss, the realization of his full monadic existence by himself becoming a universe, an "*'alam*" *'aqli*—i.e., "*saeculum*" *intelligibile*—an expression under which the Gnostic idea of Aeon and the Aeons is discernible.

173. We have mentioned that the problem came from as far back as Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, the plurality of Prime Movers or motionless eternal Intelligences causing the homocentric spheres to revolve; cf. above, p. 54.

174. Cf. pp. 357-58, n. 1.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

religion of our philosophers, a sort of inward epiphany, in the heart and the intelligence, of a Form and figure of beauty and light who invests and draws the entire soul, and in whom the soul recognizes its origin and its end, because he is the absolute individuation of its relation with the divine, and because he is *in person* the Image of its superhumanity, the companion of its eternity. But this cannot be spoken of even in symbols: this world dies to Absal as Absal dies to this world, and Absal's celestial bride does not even appear in the recital.

These at once too-brief and too-scattered reflections have already given us occasion to note in passing the contrasts and differences revealed, in comparison with Avicennism and its tradition in the Orient, by the determined opposition of the orthodox doctors in Christendom. Even where, in orthodoxy, we can speak of Avicennan influence, what is involved is largely the preservation of a schema stripped of its real figures. To have substituted the supreme God for the Active Intelligence was to have rejected the deepest motivations of angelology. It would now be proper to make a systematic comparison, in connection with the various Avicennan theses, between the historical destiny of Avicennism in Iran and what is respectively comparable in its situation in regard to Christian and to Islamic orthodoxy.

The existence of Angels, as we mentioned before (§ 5), is the second of the articles of faith set forth in the Koran itself: God, Angels, revealed Books, Messengers, the Last Day (iv:135). At first sight, then, it would seem that on this point the situation in Islam should be quite different. It was different, of course; but it would be difficult to maintain that it was more comfortable for our philosophers. In truth, a number of facts mentioned earlier (§ 5) will have shown that the orthodox doctors in Islam were under no illusions in regard to the intentions of philosophical angelology. In either case, then, we find the same suspicion aroused, and with good reason, in respect to gnostic implications. With the Koranic data, our philosophers and theosophers performed a *ta'wil* that had all the seriousness and the consequences of a *ta'wil* of the soul (above, § 2 and 3).

Yet everything takes place as if the vision of the high mountains of Iran had ceaselessly prepared the "contemplative intellect" of the Iranian soul once more to receive from the Angel Active Intelligence an illumination that again puts the memory of their hierophanies "in the present." It was upon these lofty peaks that, according to tradition, Zarathustra, the Iranian prophet, was repeatedly granted theophanies and angelophanies. What we call "angelology"

## Latin Avicennism and Iranian Avicennism

in the true sense is perhaps the peculiar charism, the gift, of the Iranian soul to the religious history of humanity. The Lord Wisdom (Ahura Mazda) does not reveal himself as solitary, but as always surrounded by the six with whom he forms the archangelic heptad of light.<sup>175</sup> And with them each of the "Adorable Ones" (Yazatas) of the celestial multitude appears not as a vague and unstable entity but as a perfectly individuated and distinct existence, recognizable by his personal name and his emblem (a flower). Furthermore, the Zoroastrian angelology puts a decisive end to all ambivalence of the *numinous*, that confusion between the divine and the demonic whereby the manifestations of the divine can elsewhere assume a terrific character. To judge by the oscillations that make consciousness waver elsewhere, and that are perceptible in the confusion perpetrated throughout history, and more than ever in our day, between angelology and demonology, we can appreciate the historical significance of the ancient Iranian faith: *yes* is not *no*, the beings of light wage a battle that is not a dialectical game, and it is to be guilty of a contradiction in terms, and a blasphemous contradiction for the Zoroastrian consciousness, to talk of an "angel of Darkness."<sup>176</sup>

Hence it is a fact of controlling significance for the philosophical and religious history of Iran that, scarcely a century and a half after Avicenna, the entire effort of Shihabaddin Yahya Suhrawardi (d. 587/1191), the young Master of Ishraq, consciously and deliberately tended toward a re-establishment of the ancient Iranian theosophy. It was not the work of "resentment." It would be truer to say that, fervor for the ancient Persian wisdom and faith in a pure spiritual Islam performed a reciprocal *ta'wil* from which a unique vision arises. The publication of Suhrawardi's works permits us to become increasingly aware of the importance of the fact, the record of which will not again be blotted from philosophical consciousness in Iran.<sup>177</sup>

We earlier had occasion to cite (§ 6) an Avicennan commentator of the seventeenth century, the Sayyed Ahmad 'Alawi, son-in-law of the great Mir

175. The Amahraspands or "Zoroastrian Archangels" are not six (as is sometimes stated), but seven, Ohrmazd being the first among them (also as the unit of their group, by virtue of the peculiarly Iranian method of calculation according to which the unit of a group forms a unit distinct from the component units); cf. the frequency with which, in Pahlavi texts, Ohrmazd, initiating his disciple, uses the ex-

pression, "We, the Amahraspands."

176. There is no possibility of confusion between a Yazata and a Daeva, between a Fereshta or Izad and a Dev.

177. Here we can only refer to our "Prolegomenes I and II," prefixed to the separate volumes of our edition of the *Opera metaphysica et mystica*. Other volumes will, we hope, soon follow.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

Damad, who amplifies the Avicennan cosmology in terms of a deeply reformed Zervanism, in the spirit of Suhrawardi's work. There is no doubt that the way for the latter had been prepared by Avicennism, whose fundamental schema speculative angelology could easily keep. But there is then an amplification that assures to Iranian Avicennism under Ishraqi influence (down to Hadi Sabzavari, d. 1878) a complexion and a destiny entirely different from those of Latin Avicennism, *a fortiori* entirely different from those of Avicennizing Augustinism. This amplification follows from a sort of explosion of the Heaven of the Fixed Stars. The hierarchy of the ten or even of the fifty Intelligences of Avicennan Peripateticism is no longer adequate for a consciousness "converted" to a new cosmos.<sup>178</sup> The Avicennan theory of the Intelligences receives the superposition of an angelology in which the Amahraspands or Zoroastrian Archangels reappear with their demiurgic functions and their names. From the Springs of the *Xvarnah*, the Light of Glory, the world of the Mothers or of the Infinite Lights, to the Perfect Natures, celestial archetypes of individual existences, there is a multiplication of celestial beings for whom the system of the eight or nine spheres no longer suffices. This certainly does not correspond to a Copernican revolution, but it was none the less a "celestial revolution," and one that would undoubtedly have faced such a reform with resources quite different from those at the disposition of Peripatetic celestial physics for the combat described earlier (above, pp. 101 ff.).

The Ishraqi reform, the establishment of the Oriental philosophy in accordance with ancient Persian sources, is, however, only one aspect of Iranian angelology. We have had occasion to show elsewhere to what a degree the concept of the latter was fundamental for the structure and coherence of the several worlds, as schematized by Ismailian philosophy.<sup>179</sup> We have neither time nor space to return to it here. In combination with the angelological developments of the theosophy of Ibn 'Arabi, it will also be characteristic of the Shi'ite Gnosticism of the sect of the Twelve, which identifies Sufism with genuine Shi'ism.<sup>180</sup> The celestial Angels emanating as powers from the primordial entity understood as cosmic Anthropos or as Light of Glory (Nur *Muhammadl*, Muhammadic Light) have their counterparts in the terrestrial

178. On this point, the whole of Suhrawardi's autobiographical testimony should be carefully read, *Hikmat al-Ishraq*, pp. 156 ff. (cf. also above, p. 101, n. 135).

179. Cf. our *Etude preliminaire*, pp. 74—112, on the symbolism of the worlds and on

the triad Michael-Gabriel-Seraphiel, and also our essays "Rituel sabeen" and "Cyclical Time."

180. Especially in Haydar Amuli, in his *Jami' al-Asrar* and his commentary on the of Ibn 'Arabi.

## Latin Avicennism and Iranian Avicennism

angels, powers, and faculties of the man-microcosm. There is already a trace of this parallelism in the commentary on the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. Still more clearly the philosopher Afzaladdin Kashani relates the degrees of the human soul with the four great Archangels.<sup>181</sup> Our notes to the translation of the Persian commentary on *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, given later in this book, indicate some references to this extensive complex.

What it is important to inquire into and formulate is the secret motivations of the soul to which the response is the vision of these hierarchies of beings of light. In the course of the present study we have more than once had occasion to suggest them. But to do so is barely the beginning of the requisite research in comparative spirituality, and a great deal more in the way of investigation, meditation, and comprehension will be necessary. For this kind of research the recitals of Avicenna and Suhrawardi furnish and will furnish the most precious personal testimony.

For an understanding of the spiritual *fact* in question, it has seemed needful to lay stress on the idea of the Angel as representing the individuation of the relation between the human soul and the divine, and on the correlation—perhaps hitherto insufficiently studied in and for itself—between angelology and mysticism; it is this correlation that was already announced by the figure of the Angel in Gnosticism, the individuation of the mystery of syzygy. Exoteric theology can illuminate the common relation of men to their common Father, or their common service to the omnipotent King. In these cases there is always a relation common to all, shared by all, situating each equidistantly from the center, so to speak. But the experience of the mystical soul is satisfied only by a one-to-one with the Beloved, for the lover cannot share his Beloved; his experience implies what we have sought to express here by individuation—an individuation, to be sure, very different from that which philosophy treats under the category of "individuation of Forms by matter."

Disputes over words would be fruitless. Whether the prerogative of the illuminating Active Intelligence is transferred to God or whether it is left to the Angel—either alternative implies secret presuppositions that it would be as difficult to put wholly into words as it is for an author himself to exhaust the meaning of his work. But if this subliminal spiritual consciousness is not reached, philosophical discussions have scarcely more significance than any administrative conversation. This is why the history of philosophy should

181. See, in the edition of his complete works (in Persian) by M. Minovi and Y. Mahdavi (Teheran, 1952), the *Javidan-Namah*, pp. 291 ff.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

never be treated apart from the history of spirituality, and indeed of daily devotional experiences. Then we are no longer dealing with systems, but with symptoms. And in the present case these symptoms reveal the recurrence of spiritual motivations that, in the course of the ages, have demanded and necessitated an angelology.

The struggle against the Avicennan theory of the Intelligences and the Active Intelligence is a chapter or an episode in angelology in the West during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It is something confined to scholars; whether the two sides were equally or unequally conscious of the "motivations" that necessitated or, on the contrary, challenged the intervention of the world of the Angel remains to be studied. But there is another episode in angelology, and, this time, it is by no means confined to scholars; we refer to the extraordinary "revival" of a cult of the Seven Archangels that began in Italy in the sixteenth century, then spread as far as Flanders and Orthodox Russia.<sup>182</sup> Finally, to come down to our own day, there is a little book by Eugenio d'Ors that, though not a scientific book, is written with much science, but above all with the heart; it constitutes a contemporary testimony of extreme importance for anyone concerned with discovering the secret needs of the soul to which angelology answers. Its very first pages contain a short sentence that an Avicennan concerned for his philosophical system could well have used in answer to William of Auvergne, and that a devotee of the Seven Archangels could also have made his own. Indeed, it required a clairvoyant and courageous penetration of a secret that, as we have just seen, may be common to philosophers and simple souls—to write, as if in rejoinder to a famous dictum of St. Teresa's, this short sentence: "No, no es cierto que solo Dios basta" (No, it is not certain that God alone suffices),<sup>183</sup>

Here we have done no more than to pose problems and to outline themes for investigation. The Avicennan recitals, as well as Suhrawardi's, have supplied the occasion. It now remains for us to follow Avicenna's three recitals, and to learn from them *where* the *Orient* is. How does one set out for it? How does one reach it, never to return?

182. Emile Male, *L'Art religieux apres le Concile de Trente*, pp. 298

ff.

183. Eugenio d'Ors, *Introduction a la vida angelica*, p. 9.

### III *THE RECITAL OF HAYY IBN YAQZAN*

#### ii. *Composition and Authenticity of the Recital; Commentaries and Manuscripts*

As we suggested above (§ 4, p. 44), a methodical "recitation" of the three recitals of the Avicennan cycle would give first place to the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. This recital is an initiation into the Orient: the meaning of the Orient is announced to the adept by a messenger from that Orient itself, who shows him its direction, describes the difficult stages of the journey thither, sets forth the conditions for undertaking it, and finally concludes with the invitation: "If thou wilt, follow me." The mental dramaturgy of the recital is, then, still an anticipation and a preparation; the psychic event of the inwardly experienced celestial ascent will be remembered and re-cited in the *Recital of the Bird*. At the end of the first recital of the trilogy, we can already know what is to be understood by "Oriental philosophy." Since the Orient is the world of Forms or "Ideas," in opposition to the "Occident" into which such of these as are destined for a certain time to "inform" Matter descend, the Oriental philosophy will be knowledge of the Ideas in and by themselves, a philosophy of the world of the Angel in its three degrees: spiritual, celestial, terrestrial. If we would discern the Avicennan program for the Oriental philosophy, the first source is this recital, in which the vision of the Orient is stated clearly and openly, and which for this reason is to be added to the contexts suggested by the references to "Oriental wisdom" in the glosses on the so-called *Theology* of Aristotle.<sup>1</sup>

1. Cf. the passages on this "Oriental wisdom" (which is mentioned six times in the notes on the *Theology* of Aristotle) brought together by Vajda, "Notes," p. 348. These references give us incomparably better information on the subject than the treatise



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

At what period of his life was Avicenna led to compose this recital? We are here indebted for a precious answer to his famulus, Juzjani, the master's faithful disciple and biographer. After his sojourn in Ray, where he had attached himself to the service of the regent, Queen Sayyeda, and her young son, Majdud-dawla, the philosopher had gone on to Qazwin, and thence to Hamadan. There, after he had served Prince Shamsuddawla<sup>2</sup> as physician and had accompanied him on an ill-fated expedition against the governor of Kermanshah, the prince, upon their return, asked him to assume the vizierate. Our philosopher was imprudent enough to accept. He soon had difficulties with the soldiers, who were dissatisfied with their pay; a sedition broke out, and he owed his safety only to the prince's protection. Having again had occasion to treat and cure the prince, who was a constant victim of stomach trouble (*qulanj*), he was asked by his royal patron to accept the vizierate a second time. This was also the moment that Juzjani chose to ask the master to compose a commentary on the works of Aristotle. An overwhelming program of work was now inaugurated at Hamadan (it was later to be repeated at Ispahan). The day being taken up with politics, the night was devoted to serious matters. Juzjani would read over the pages of the physics of the *Shifa*, another disciple those of the *Qanun*. The session would continue far into the night; then came a short period of relaxation—familiar conversation, a little wine, a little music.<sup>3</sup>

This studious daily routine continued until the unfortunate Prince Shamsuddawla finally died from one of his attacks of *qulanj*. His son, upon acceding, asked Avicenna to assume the vizierate again. But this time the philosopher had had his fill of political responsibilities, and doubtless of Hamadan as well, for, apparently wanting a change of climate, he secretly corresponded with 'Alauddawla, prince of Ispahan, asking to enter his service. This secret correspondence, alas! became known to the prince of Hamadan's vizier. Avicenna hid in the house of a friend; unfortunately, he was denounced and arrested,

published under the title of *Mantiq al-Mashriqiyyin* (Logic of the Orientals), for the latter takes us but a very little way along the road of the philosophy termed "Oriental." Suhrawardi had already noted this, and it was all that we set out to say in our "Prolegomenes II," pp. 13 ff.

2. This is the prince whose name in Latin translations is transposed literally as *Sol Regni*; cf. A. Birkenmajer, "Avicennas Vorrede zum 'Liber sufficientiae' und Roger

Bacon," p. 314: ". . . eo quidem existente occupato officio administrationis regis cujusdam, qui nominabatur *Sol Regni*."

S. Cf. the biography as edited and continued by Juzjani, Arabic text of which was printed in the upper margin of Avicenna's *Mantiq al-Mashriqiyyin* (Cairo, 1328/1910), pp. z-w, and Persian translation published by Ahmad Khurasani at the beginning of his edition of the *Danesh-Namah* (Teheran, 1315), pp. yh-yz.

## Composition and Authenticity of the Recital

conveyed to the fortress of Fardajan, and imprisoned. He remained there for four months. This wretched confinement would doubtless have continued with no foreseeable end, had not 'Alauddawla of Ispahan chosen just this time to lead an attack against Hamadan; by a pleasant irony of fate, the prince of Hamadan and his vizier, after the rout of their army, were forced to seek refuge in the very fortress in which they were holding our philosopher captive. Once 'Alauddawla had been disposed of, they all returned to Hamadan more or less reconciled. But this time Avicenna had had more than enough; one day the shaikh succeeded in fleeing, in company with his brother Mahmud, Juzjani, and two servants. After many hardships our five companions, disguised as Sufis, arrived at the gates of Ispahan; friends of the shaikh and envoys from the emir received them, and they made a triumphal entry into the city. It is easy to make the same journey today and to contemplate the same landscape that our fugitives saw.

Such is the succession of dramatic episodes in the course of which the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* was written. As the faithful Juzjani tells us,<sup>4</sup> the shaikh composed it during his detention in the fortress of Fardajan, not far from Hamadan. As may be supposed, there is more here than a mere biobibliographical episode. If the reader will keep this period of trial well in mind as he reads the beginning of the recital, he will be able to gauge the depth of the experience that the narrator translates when he speaks of the time when his soul was *at home* and could go forth into the pleasant places that lay hidden about its own city. The captivity in the depths of the cosmic crypt (above, § 2, pp. 16 ff.), the dark pit into which the pilgrim of Suhrawardi's *Recital of Occidental Exile* finds himself cast—all this acquires a tragically literal meaning. The inward escape, it would seem, was rendered all the easier; solitude summoned the vision of Hayy ibn Yaqzan, prepared a welcome to the invitation to leave a prison whose jailers know not that they are themselves captives. *The Recital of the Bird* will give its full development to this inward adventure.

In the preceding chapters we have sought to set forth all that urged to such an adventure; how the Avicennan philosophy itself provided the setting for it: *who* was to be found again, in *what* conditions one must put oneself in order to succeed in it. For all angelology comes in answer to these questions, which are secretly posed from the beginning, long before they are formulated to consciousness. We are not sure that the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* has yet been read in accordance with this intention. The intention has doubtless been

4. Ibid., text pp. h-z, and Persian translation, p. yy.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

falsified by the confusion between symbol and allegory, which is always being carelessly made and which we have exposed here on several occasions (above, § 3, pp. 28 ff.). A certain minimum of attention, love, and sympathy are required for an understanding of the secret aims of a book or a soul.

Avicenna composed this recital in a style that, to tell the truth, is neither simple nor easy. His Persian translator and commentator has here rendered us the greatest service—that of making us understand and love the recital. The greatest admirers of the Persian language are sometimes inclined to admit that it is better adapted to suggesting poetical intuitions than to strictly delimiting concepts. I am under the impression that in the present case this admission would suffer an encouraging contradiction. We have only to compare the Arabic original with the Persian rendering to learn what a valuable contribution the latter makes to an understanding of the text. It contains more than one archaism to rejoice philologists in search of ancient Iranian words that have vanished from current usage, although, as a philosopher, I have not had especially to dwell on them. . . .

As we remarked earlier (above, § 1), it was by study of Suhrawardi's mystical recitals that we were led to study Avicenna's—that is, by a wish to discover what proportion of Avicennan inspiration the former might contain. The *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* proved to be of particular importance, for it is in the epilogue to this recital that Suhrawardi's *Recital of Occidental Exile* found its starting point. By that fact the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* becomes a document of prime importance for an estimate of the positive relation between the two masters. In itself, however, this would not have been a sufficient reason to attempt a general presentation of Avicenna's recitals at this time. To the kind invitation extended to us by the Iranian Commission of National Monuments on the occasion of Avicenna's millenary, we should have replied by a different proposal, were it not that an earlier discovery suggested that we could add something, if not to the part of Avicenna's work that he is now known to have composed in Persian, at least to the Avicennan corpus in the Persian language.

We should not go quite so far as to call this discovery fortuitous, for, at least after the event, these journeys in research give very much the impression of having been mysteriously guided. At the beginning of the present book (above, p. 6) I related how, during the course of a period of work at the Library of Santa Sophia (Aya Sofia) at Istanbul some ten years ago, a lucky mistake in a shelf mark led me to discover a *majmu'a* (collection) containing

## Composition and Authenticity of the Recital

a Persian translation of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* with a commentary in Persian. In the state of our bibliographical knowledge the manuscript appeared to be an *unicum*; as every scholar knows from experience, this, thank heaven, is a wholly provisional condition for a manuscript. Thus two other copies of this precious Persian amplification of the recital came to light in Iran; it now became possible to undertake a critical edition.<sup>5</sup>

So far, three commentaries in Arabic have been recorded;<sup>6</sup> doubtless others exist. Had we been able to do so on the basis of reliable data, we should have wished to indicate the distribution of these commentaries among the manuscripts. We are sorry to say that the available documentation does not yet permit of this.<sup>7</sup> Then too, for us the essential and primary interest lay in a contribution to Avicennism in Persian, and consequently in the work of our Iranian commentator, who unfortunately shrouded himself in anonymity. We have not even undertaken to give a fresh critical edition of the Arabic original;

5. The lamented Bahar (Malek al-Shu'ara) in his history of Persian prose, *Sobok Shonasi*, II, 38 ff., had previously recorded the existence of the Persian commentary on *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* and quoted a fragment corresponding to §§ 1 and 2 of p. 4 of our edition of the text. He also recorded the opinions of several scholars who considered the commentary to be the work of Juzjani, Avicenna's famulus. For his part, Mahdi Bayani, in his anthology of Persian prose, *Namuna-e Sokhan-e Farsi*, pp. 90-93, had published the prologue and a fragment corresponding to ch. 2, pp. 3-6, of our edition, after MS. Sepahsalar 1216, which we mention further on. On the basis of the date of composition, which can be determined within a few years, and on the fact that Shahrazuri and Baihaqi attribute a long commentary on *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* to Juzjani, Bayani does not hesitate to conclude that, since Ibn Zayla's commentary is in Arabic, our commentary must be the work of Juzjani. This is likewise the attribution that we propose further on as the most plausible.

6. Cf. Brockelmann, *Geschichte*, I, 593, and Suppl., I, 817, No. 26.

7. Unfortunately, it is not possible to

obtain an idea of their distribution from the *Essai de bibliographie avicennienne* published by Anawati, pp. 274-76, # 249. The bibliography furnishes a census of the manuscripts, but without indicating whether they contain simply the text or the text with a commentary, and which commentary. So far as Avicenna's text itself is concerned, it does not appear that there are differences except for the fact that some manuscripts begin with the prologue, *wa-ba'du, fa-inna israrakum*, whereas others begin at once with the recital, *qad yasirat li*. Yet the *Incipit* of MS. Ahmet III, 3447, for example, shows that it contains a commentary (which one? it is neither Ibn Zayla's nor al-Munawi's); as for the *Explicit* in the first person, is it an important variant of Avicenna's text or simply an addition by the commentator? We have, moreover, already pointed out ("Prolegomenes II," p. 93) that MS. 'Ashir 441- has no connection with Avicenna's *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*; it is Suhrawardi's *Recital of Occidental Exile* (*al-Ghurbat al-gharbiya*). The first words refer, to be sure, to Suhrawardi's reading the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* and the *Recital of Salaman and Absal*, but that is all; the work is Suhrawardi's.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

the latter appears in our edition because our commentator reproduces it, section by section, before giving the Persian translation, and because in fact this confrontation provides the surest ground for an appreciation of the latter. In its turn, our own translation has never lost sight of this Persian witness, to whom it has owed more than one happy solution.

Two commentaries in Arabic have been occasionally used in our notes on the Persian commentary on the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. The spirit and method of these two commentaries differ markedly from the Persian translator's procedure. Yet the author of one of them was Husayn ibn Tahir ibn Zayla of Ispahan (d. 440/1048), who was contemporary with our translator and could have known him personally. Ibn Zayla was himself also a pupil of Avicenna's; his commentary has been known since the edition by Mehren, who published it almost complete in the margin of the text of the recital. No lengthy comparison is needed to show that the work is entirely different from the Persian commentary published in the French edition of the present book and translated here. Another less well-known commentary, also in Arabic, is the work of 'Abdurra'uf al-Munawi al-Shafi'i, a prolific Egyptian writer on traditions and Sufism (b. 952/1545, d. 1031/1621).<sup>8</sup> The text followed and commented on by both agrees perfectly with that commented on by our Iranian translator. We may also mention a letter of Mir Damad (d. 1630) commenting on some symbols in the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* for a correspondent who had questioned him on the subject.<sup>9</sup> These are but a few landmarks in a long spiritual tradition for which the figure of Hayy ibn Yaqzan, as personal symbol of the Shaikh al-Ra'is, presented itself as an archetype. An edifying collection could be made by gleaning the references and citations scattered through the works of all our philosophers.

Now, an important question remains. We should have been gratified to be able to attach an author's name to our commentary; we incline toward a probable attribution, without, however, considering it certain. As we just said, Ibn Zayla, himself an Ispahani, belonged to the circle of Avicenna's friends and disciples at Ispahan. However, his commentary in Arabic is known; it is en-

8. For his biography (he is said to have died from poison administered by envious rivals who could not tolerate the success of his teaching) and the list of his works, cf. Brockelmann, II, 393, and Suppl., II, 417. Manuscripts of his commentary are very scarce; I know it from copies in two private collections in Teheran, for which I express

my gratitude to the owners, Mr. Soltan al-Qorra'i and Mr. Fakhraddin Nasiri.

9. Cf. our "Prolegomenes II," p. 63, n. 130, description of the manuscript in the Library of the Majlis at Teheran (Tabataba'i Collection No. 1284), knowledge of which I owe to Mr. Khouyi Zeryab.

## Composition and Authenticity of the Recital

tirely different from our Persian commentary. Nor does anything point to the authorship of another disciple of Avicenna, Bahmanyar ibn Marzuban, the good Zoroastrian from Azerbaijan, known for his work that is a compendium of the master's. We can hardly think of the master's own brother, who was his companion and intimate, as we have already mentioned. This brother had very early professed Ismailism; now, our commentator betrays a slight anti-Ismailian bias, although he does not expressly name the sect.

There remains, then, only established fact that would justify a hypothesis. As the prologue states, it was at the express request of the prince of Ispahan, 'Alauddawla, that the Iranian translator undertook his rendering and commentary in Persian, and this gives us a *terminus ad quern*. The Kakoyid prince died in A.H. 433/A.D. 1041-42; Avicenna had died in A.H. 428/A.D. 1037. Either, then, the Persian work was composed during Avicenna's lifetime or it was composed at latest during the five years following his death. Thus we are here at the very sources. It was during the first half of our eleventh century that the Persian translation and amplification were undertaken at the prince's request by a disciple and intimate of the master. Nothing, it would seem, could better authenticate the text of the recital. But who was this estimable disciple? Here we owe a precious indication to Baihaqi's *History of the Philosophers*. It tells us that, among others, the faithful Juzjani had himself composed a commentary on the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*.<sup>10</sup> It does not say whether this commentary was in Arabic or in Persian, which would have settled the question for us. However, since two commentators on *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* are mentioned among Avicenna's intimates, and since Ibn Zayla's Arabic commentary is out of the question, it seems probable that our Persian commentary is the work of the disciple and biographer of the master, Abu 'Ubayd 'Abd al-Wahid Juzjani; it was he, it appears, to whom Prince 'Alauddawla addressed his command. However, this probability does not quite reach the certainty that would have justified our setting Juzjani's name at the head of our commentary: 11 in any case, it probably contains the master's own comments on his recital, made in the course of conversations with his intimates.

10. Cf. Baihaqi, *Tatimma Siwan al-Hikma*, ed. Muhammad Shafi', No. 51 of the Arabic part, p. 94, and No. 49 of the Persian part, p. 61.

11. I do not believe that I am being overcautious here. Unfortunately, the following situation has arisen: the arrangements made for the celebration of Avicenna's

millenary at Teheran forced me, for the edition of the present work in the Collection du Millenaire, to bring out Part II—that is, only my French translation of the Persian commentary together with the Persian text—separately, as a first installment. This contained neither the notes nor the glosses, but merely a four-page preface. Before judg-

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

On the other hand, the fact that we thus reach the sources themselves and that the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* has come down to us, in its Arabic text and in its Persian translation, as it was read and understood in Avicenna's own circle suffices to dispel all doubts that have been expressed as to its authenticity. These doubts, furthermore, were chiefly put in the form of questions, and tended to the supposition that there was a third *risala* entitled *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, different both from Ibn Tufayl's philosophical romance and from the *risala* that has hitherto been considered the work of Avicenna. Now, this doubt was raised solely on the basis of a passage in Ibn Khaldun's *Prolegomena*.<sup>12</sup> The passage refers to the possibility of a spontaneous generation of the human organism, due to an exceptional influence of the heavenly bodies, and starting with a mass of clay fermenting under the action of a sufficient degree of heat. The Muslim historian ends his digression by stating that Avicenna had set forth this theory at length in his *Risala Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. Leon Gauthier had already advanced very reasonable arguments against the conclusions that some scholars sought to draw from this passage in Ibn Khaldun.<sup>13</sup> We confess that we do not understand how or why so much ingenuity and subtlety have since been expended on this passage in order at all costs

ment was passed on a work neither officially nor completely published, caution would have suggested waiting until the entire work was available. I really find it difficult to understand how and why Mr. Sa'ïd Naficy, basing himself solely on the passage in which Baihaqi (*Tatimma*, p. 92) mentions the composition of a commentary on *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* by Ibn Zayla, believes that, in a premature publication, he can reproach the editor of the anonymous Persian commentary with not having observed that it was the work of Ibn Zaylai (Cf. *Payam-e Now*, VI, 2 [<sup>1331</sup>], 67.) Will the distinguished critic be good enough, for his part, to observe four things: (1) Ibn Zayla's commentary has been well known since Mehren's edition; it would have been easy to make a comparison. (2) Ibn Zayla's commentary is in Arabic, ours is in Persian, and is not a translation of it. (3) Baihaqi himself cites a few lines (in Arabic) from Ibn Zayla's commentary; it would have been easy to ascertain whether they occurred in our text. (4) Two pages further on (p. 94), Baihaqi mentions

Juzjani's commentary; it would have been enough to turn those pages in order to formulate our own hypothesis with due caution. We have already mentioned (above, p. 127, n. 5) the opinion of Mr. Mahdi Bayani, who, on the testimony of Baihaqi and Shahrâzuri, and by a train of reasoning similar to our own but without our residuum of hesitation, attributed the Persian commentary to Juzjani.

12. Cf. Miguel Cruz Hernandez, *La Metafisica de Avicena*, pp. 217 ff., referring to the French translation of the *Prolegomena* by de Slane, II, 385. [Cf. Rosenthal tr., II, 371 f.]

13. Cf. on this point his controversy with Emilio Garcia Gomez, in *Hayy ben Yaqdhan, roman philosophique d'Ibn Thofail*, pp. xix-xxii. It is none the less most regrettable that Leon Gauthier has persisted (p. v) in maintaining the impossible reading *mushriqiya* against the evidence of the form *mashriqjya* attested by the entire Iranian tradition of the Ishraqiyun.

\*

## Composition and Authenticity of the Recital

to infer the existence of a third *risala* also entitled *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, no longer extant today, and allegedly the work of Avicenna and the source of Ibn Tufayl's doctrine. The reasonable conclusion, corroborated by many other examples, is that Ibn Khaldun obviously committed a slip in attributing to Avicenna the work by Ibn Tufayl that bears the same title; he was neither the first nor the last to be guilty of the same confusion.<sup>14</sup> And we really do not see how or why the single authority of the Maghribi historian, writing in the fourteenth century, should outweigh the Iranian tradition that goes back to the period itself and to Avicenna's own circle.

Hence I see no use in here re-examining the arguments advanced to countenance the hypothesis of a third *risala* of which not a trace remains. The text long since published by Mehren is certainly Avicenna's *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*; we read it here translated into Persian and supplied with a Persian commentary at the command of Prince 'Alauddawla himself. It can safely be accepted that, in Avicenna's own lifetime, or at latest five years after his death, the circle of his intimates and that of the prince who was his protector were perfectly well informed as to the authorship of our *risala*. We hardly see what could be said against the obviousness of the fact. Ibn Khaldun's information was erroneous on this point, but the great historian was not without an excuse. We indubitably have before us here the recital composed by our philosopher during his imprisonment in the fortress of Fardajan, according to the statement of Juzjani, his famulus, who is perhaps also his Persian translator. As further evidence, we have a long tradition; there is Ibn Zayla's own commentary; there is the definite reference by Suhrawardi in his *Recital of Occidental Exile*; <sup>15</sup> much later there is al-Munawi's commentary and, about the same date, Mir Damad's letter. Really, if doubts can seem supererogatory, it is certainly in the present case.

Our Iranian commentator's method of procedure is intelligent and simple. Instead of breaking up the original text, as Ibn Zayla does, by an *ay* or a *ya'ni* to introduce the explanation of each clause of a sentence,<sup>16</sup> he has produced a

14. In the preface (pp. 7-8) to his edition of *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, Mehren had already cited an example of this persistent confusion. We could add that, no less than our Persian commentary, the commentary by Ibn Zayla, himself a disciple and intimate of the master, constituted strong evidence in favor of the Avicennan authenticity of **the recital**.

15. Cf. translation of the prologue to the *Recital of Occidental Exile*, in our "Prolegomenes II," p. 88.

16. Al-Munawi proceeds in the same fashion; he even abridges his citation of the passage (. . . *qawluhu* . . . *ila*), then gives his commentary.



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

really personal, original, and coherent work. He divides the entire recital into twenty-five chapters and, as might be expected of one familiar with both the text and the master's thought, has done this so reliably and intelligently that, we having in our turn undertaken to introduce a leitmotiv as a guide to the reader at the beginning of each chapter, the formula for it each time presented itself spontaneously and distinctly. He begins, then, by translating into Persian the chapter that he has constituted (two of our manuscripts take the precaution of each time giving the corresponding portion of the original Arabic text). He then presents his commentary. For each chapter, the latter forms a complete and organic development. It is interesting to note that the Persian rendering is each time introduced by the word *tafsir* (hence in the sense of *translation*), while the commentary is introduced by the word *shark* (to these words the third-person suffix *sh* is each time added).

Such is the order reproduced by our edition and our translation. We have simply numbered each chapter and divided the longer chapters into numbered paragraphs. It will be seen that the Persian translation follows the Arabic text closely, differing principally only in that it substitutes clear formulas where the language of the text tends to be alembicated. When real variants occur, we have indicated them in our notes. But in general our translation has been able to play simultaneously on the two "keyboards," though the corresponding registration has sometimes been momentarily modified.<sup>17</sup>

In establishing the Persian **text**, **we have** made use of the following manuscripts:

A = Istanbul, Aya Sofia (Santa Sophia) 2458. This is the manuscript that gave rise to the present study (above, p. 6). The manuscript is certainly very old; to judge by the form of the *naskh* and its orthographical peculiarities, the copy must date from the second half of the seventh century A.H.

Unlike the two manuscripts described below, this one does not give the prologue to the recital, and does not reproduce the Arabic text of each chapter.

It is clear from the doxology that the commentator, or at least the copyist, was a Shi'ite. The first sentence of the text (corresponding to p. 3, l. 12, of our edition) is very characteristic of his manner. We get the impression that he wrote from the dictation of a colleague, and that, with the freedom of a man

17. We may here record the existence of Hebrew versions: a poetical imitation bearing the Hebrew title *Khay b. Meqiz*, generally attributed to the celebrated Ibn Ezra (d. 1167); and "a literal translation into Hebrew with the commentary by Ibn Zayla, Avicenna's disciple, made by an unknown scholar," Mehren, *Traites*, pp. 8-9.

## Composition and Authenticity of the Recital

who understands his text too well, he permitted himself very frequent inversions, transpositions, substitutions, etc. These are almost always "variants" that in no way affect the meaning; hence we have had to renounce recording all of them in our *apparatus criticus*, lest the latter should become disproportionately bulky. In compensation, this manuscript has been of great assistance on several occasions. In particular, in ch. 9, from p. 31, l. 12, to p. 32, l. 11 (translation, pp. 315-16; cf. p. 315, nn. 14 ff.) an unfortunate *homoteleton* has caused the omission of a most important passage on *ta'wil* from our other two manuscripts; it is to MS. A that we here owe a complete reading. Similarly, p. 46, l. 16 (p. 335, n. 7), the sentence would be incomplete but for MS. A. It is to the same manuscript that we owe a reading that is contrary to all our other manuscripts (both Persian and Arabic), but which, all considered, appears to us to be the only consistent one. In ch. 4, Hayy ibn Yaqzan, after revealing his name, "Vivens filius Vigilantis," declares that he always keeps his face turned toward his "father." How does it come about that, when they repeat the name of the latter, the other manuscripts read "Hayy" *Vivens* (text p. 9, ll. 6 and 15) when we expect *Vigilans*, Yaqzan (*bidar*)? We had consigned the latter reading to the *apparatus criticus*, but were finally forced to recognize its superiority in our translation (p. 8). These are only a few examples.

*M* = Teheran, Malek Library (without shelf mark or pagination). It is an imposing *majmu'a*. From the *ductus* of the script, the date of the copy may be conjectured to be of the eleventh century A.H. In addition, a note on the collation of the text, signed Muhammad Reza Qummi, bears the date A.H. 1078. Another note of collation, signed *Farhang*, is quite recent, being dated in the month of Aban, A.H. 1323 (solar), corresponding to the month of Zu'lqa'da, A.H. 1366 (lunar). The manuscript, which has been our principal source in establishing our text, has obviously been much used. The margins are crowded with notes; among them are variants and glosses drawn from Mehren's edition.

*S* = Teheran, Library of the Madrasa of the Sepahsalar. *Majmu'a* No. 1216 (unpaginated). The collection includes forty-eight treatises, a considerable number of which are by Avicenna. Our *risala* and its commentary extend to thirty pages of the *majmu'a* at the rate of twenty-nine lines per page, in a good Persian Nashki script. To judge from the latter, the copy may be placed between the years 1110 and 1150 of the Hegira. The flyleaf informs us that the manuscript entered the library of E'tesad al-Soltana in A.H. 1279. The *waqf* bears

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

the date A.H. 1297. This manuscript belongs to the same family as the preceding one. It is marked by a number of blunders on the part of the copyist, who has omitted a passage or distorted a word here and there.

For the Arabic text, we have collated with:

*E* = Mehren's edition, Leiden, 1889 (*Traites mystiques d'Avicenne*, 1<sup>er</sup> fasc.).

*F* = Teheran, Ferdowsi National Library, Arabic MS. 884. This is a modern manuscript, copied by Ghulam Husayn al-Tabib. It contains (foll. 1-88<sup>b</sup>) the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* with Ibn Zayla's commentary; copy dated 1275 A.H.; this is followed (foil. 89<sup>a</sup>-103) by the *qasida* on the soul with a commentary dated A.H. 1279.

This manuscript served us simply as supplementary evidence for the Arabic text. As we said, we are not undertaking a new critical edition of the latter; our task essentially concerned the translation and commentary as contributions to the Avicennan corpus in Persian. As for the Arabic text, it should be published again, accompanied by all the existing Arabic commentaries; we shall perhaps undertake this task someday.

The plan of the present work should now be clear. In this Part I, devoted to the cycle of Avicenna's recitals, we have first set forth the components and the motifs of the Avicennan *Weltanschauung*, laying stress on the fundamental angelology, as we were led to do by the Iranian commentator, who is perhaps the faithful Juzjani himself. In this same Part I there now follow translations of these recitals, accompanied by a minimum of commentary. Part II offers a complete translation of the Persian commentary on *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, together with our notes and glosses on it. Finally, the *Persian part* of the present work (of the original edition published in Teheran) presents a complete edition of the Persian translation of *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* and the Persian commentary, each chapter being preceded by the Arabic original.<sup>18</sup>

Obviously, to profit from the commentary, the corresponding portion of Avicenna's text must be reread with each chapter. Hence, in Part II of this work, we have each time given the corresponding portion in its entirety; in so doing

18. As we mentioned above (pp. 129 ff., n. 11), Part II of the work—that is, the French translation accompanied by the Persian text—forms the first fascicule in the Edition du Millenaire. In addition, Part II and Part III (= notes and glosses to the present Part II) were published together, with a special introduction, in the Persian series of the UNESCO Collection of Representative Works, under the title *Le Recit d'Hayy ibn Yaqzan* (1953).

## Composition and Authenticity of the Recital

we have, after all, only followed the plan of the Iranian translator. Now, it is no less obvious that such a reading of text and commentary together represents an effort of rational comprehension that should come only second; to limit oneself to it would be to miss direct contact with Avicenna's thought and underlying intention. It is the text itself, with no additions, that must be faced and read Straight through; such a reading may possibly cause a shock, give an impression of disorientation and strangeness, especially if the reader is not yet familiar with the Avicennan schema of the world. But just such impressions of shock and unfamiliarity are eminently appropriate to the situation of a pilgrim adventuring toward the "Orient." This is why, in the pages that follow, we shall first present our translation of the text itself of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. The reader will then be given the opportunity to proceed through the other two recitals; under these conditions, the commentary will render all the services that it is capable of rendering, and at the same time will reveal its own limitations.

By proceeding in this fashion, we have a further hope. As we mentioned, the first edition of the Arabic text of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* was published by Mehren more than sixty years ago. Since then, it is through this edition that Avicenna's recital has chiefly been known;<sup>19</sup> and as for translations, it has usually been considered sufficient simply to summarize Mehren's summary. If Mehren deserves all the credit of a pioneer, it does not detract from his merits to observe that the extreme pallidity of his translation, or rather of his summary in French, gives scarcely a hint of the genuine features of the vision and the mental iconography, particularly in regard to the person of Hayy ibn Yaqzan, who is by no means an "old man."

This anemic pallidity is doubtless responsible for the rather sorry reputation of our text. Brockelmann<sup>20</sup> refers to it as a "dry allegory," whose substance only Ibn Tufayl had the genius to turn into a genuine philosophical romance. The statement is doubly erroneous. We have remarked more than once that the confusion between symbol and allegory is a most unfortunate one. The *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* is not an "allegory," any more than the Angel is an allegory.

19. It is republished in the collection *Jami' al-Bada'i'* (Cairo, 1335/1917) (Anawati, p. 326); more recently, Ahmad Amin has produced a strange edition in which Avicenna's and Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* are given in the margin of Suhrawardi's

*Recital of Occidental Exile [al-Ghurbat al-gharbiya]* edited from a single manuscript and with a garbled title (*al-Ghariba*)!

20. Cf. the reference given above, p. 127, n. 6.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

Anyone who insists upon taking it as such has only himself to blame if the recital seems to have neither tone nor substance. In the second place, despite the identical titles, and the reappearance of figures from Avicenna's recitals, Ibn Tufayl's original philosophical romance can in no sense be considered an amplification of the Avicennan *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*.<sup>21</sup> This trite observation will doubtless have to be repeated more than once. It would constitute a first compensation if our translation, combining the resources of the Arabic text *and* the Persian translation, should succeed in dissipating any impression of dryness, and convey a tone of restrained emotion that is a prelude to the touching tone of the *Recital of the Bird*.

As to our notes and glosses to Part II,<sup>22</sup> their purpose is not to accumulate pure erudition around the recital, regarding it as an object of *historical* curiosity. They attempt to bring out the problems, to co-ordinate them with the most *contemporary* research; they will have fulfilled their intended function if they bring the Avicennan recitals to the attention not only of "historians of ideas," but also of pure philosophers and, with them, of psychologists especially interested in tracing and analyzing symbols. For the Avicennan recital is only an exemplification of the archetype that has not ceased to possess the Iranian soul and to inspire the dreams, of its poetry and literature.

And now, at this particular point in our study, we can only invite the reader, a seeker like ourselves, to essay the ordeal of the recital. The journey into the Orient on which Hayy ibn Yaqzan invites us with Avicenna perhaps differs in its vicissitudes from Gerard de Nerval's. But is the object of the Quest different? The *Recital of the Bird* can answer us by a remarkable recurrence of symbols. We finally saw (above, p. 109) the "journey in company with the Angel" as an exaltation of the *journey of Tobias and the Angel* to the mystical plane that gives it its ultimate meaning, the meaning of an archetype . . . and it too is a journey into the Orient, to Ecbatana—that is, to Hamadan, the city with seven ramparts of seven colors, not far from which, a prisoner in a fortress, Avicenna heard the invitation and wrote the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*.

21. The characters (Hayy ibn Yaqzan, Absal, Salaman) "received their names from the master Abu 'Ali [Ibn Sina]," says Ibn Tufayl, and that is all (cf. Gauthier, p. 20 of the Arabic text). A comparative study, which there can be no question of undertaking here, would therefore have to analyze the entirely different ways in which the material **is employed in the two** works. On

Avicenna's *Recital of Salaman and Absal*, cf. below, ch. v.

22. The schedule of the millenary celebration obliged us to finish writing and printing them before writing and printing the present part of the work; hence our references to the latter could only be a **general** "see Part I," without page **numbers**.

## 12. *Translation of the Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*

YOUR PERSISTENCE, my brothers, in demanding that I set forth the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* for you has finally triumphed over my stubborn determination not to do so; it has untied the bond of my firm resolve to defer and delay. Thus I have found myself ready to come to your aid. May we look to God for help and support!

ONCE WHEN I HAD taken up residence in my city, I chanced to go out with my companions to one of the pleasure places that lie about the same city. Now, as we were coming and going, making a circle, suddenly in the distance appeared a Sage. He was beautiful; his person shone with a divine glory. Certainly he had tasted of years; long duration had passed over him. Yet there was seen in him only the freshness proper to young men; no weakness bowed his bearing, no fault injured the grace of his stature. In short, no sign of old age was to be found in him, save the imposing gravity of old Sages.

WHEN I HAD SEEN this Sage, I felt a desire to converse with him. From my inmost depths arose a need to become intimate with him and to have familiar access to him. So, with my companions, I went in his direction. When we had approached, he took the initiative; he wished us peace and honored us with his salutation. Then, smiling, he addressed us in words that were sweet to our hearts.

4. MANY WORDS were exchanged between us, until at last the conversation led us to such a point that I questioned him about everything to do with his person, and sought to learn from him what his mode of life and profession were, and even his name and lineage and country. Then he said to me: "My name is *Vivens*; my lineage, *filius Vigilantis*; as to my country, it is the Celestial Jerusalem [lit., the "Most Holy Dwelling," *al-Bait al-Muqaddas*]. My profession

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

is to be forever journeying, to travel about the universe so that I may know all its conditions. My face is turned toward my father, and my father is *Vigilans*. From him I have learned all science, he has given me the keys to every kind of knowledge. He has shown me the roads to follow to the extreme confines of the universe, so that since my journey embraces the whole circle of it, it is as if all the horizons of all climes were brought together before me."

5. OUR CONVERSATION continued without interruption. I questioned him concerning the difficult sciences. I learned from him how to solve their obscurities, until finally, from transition to transition, we came to the science of physiognomy. I observed in him such penetration and sagacity in that science that I was filled with admiration; for it was he who took the initiative when we came to physiognomy and the various facts that have to do with-it. He said to me: "The science of physiognomy is among the sciences the profit from which is paid cash down and whose benefit is immediate, for it reveals to thee what every man conceals of his own nature, so that thou canst proportion thine attitude of freedom or reserve toward each man, and make it befit the situation.

"IN THEE, physiognomy reveals at once the most excellent of creatural types and a mixture of clay and of inanimate natures that receive every impression. It shows thee to be such that, to whichever side thou art drawn, to that side thou goest. When thou art held upon the right road and art called to it, thou becomest upright and pure. But if a deceiver seduce thee into the road of error, thou dost submit to be led astray. These companions who are about thee and never leave thee are evil companions. It is to be feared that they will seduce thee and that thou wilt remain captive in their bonds, unless the divine safekeeping reach thee and preserve thee from their malice.

### Translation of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*

7. "THAT COMPANION who walks ever before thee, exhorting thee, is a liar, a frivolous babbler, who beautifies what is false, forges fictions; he brings thee information without thy bidding and without thy having questioned him; he mingles false and true therein, he sullies truth with error, even though, in spite of all, he is thy secret eye and thy illuminator. It is through his channel that news reaches thee of what is foreign to thy neighborhood, absent from the place where thou art. It is laid upon thee to separate the good money from among all the counterfeit coins, to glean what is true among the lies, to free what is right from the matrix of errors, since thou canst not wholly do without him. It may happen that sometimes divine aid will lead thee by the hand and rescue thee from the straying that leads nowhere, and that sometimes thou wilt remain in perplexity and stupor; and sometimes it may happen that false testimony will seduce thee.

"As for the companion on thy right, he is greatly violent; when he is roused by anger, no advice can restrain him; to treat him courteously nowise lessens his excitement. He is like a fire catching on dead wood, like a torrent dashing down from a height, like a drunken camel, like a lioness whose cub has been killed.

"Lastly, that companion on thy left is a sloven, a glutton, a lecher; nothing can fill his belly but the earth; nothing satisfies his appetite but mud and clay. He licks, tastes, devours, covets. He is like a pig that has been starved and then turned loose among refuse. And it is to these evil companions, O wretch, that thou hast been bound. There is no way for thee to get loose from them save by an expatriation that will take thee to a country whose soil may not be trodden by such as they. But because the hour of that expatriation is not yet come, and thou canst not yet reach that country, because thou canst not break with them and there is no refuge for thee where they cannot come at thee, so act that thou shalt have the upper hand of them and that thine authority shall be greater than theirs. Let them not seize thine own rein, suffer them not to put the halter upon thee, but overcome them



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

by acting toward them in the fashion of an experienced master; lead them by forcing them to remain in the right path, for each time that thou showest thy strength, it is thou who subduest them, no longer they who subdue thee; it is thou who mountest them, no longer they **who** make thee their mount.

**8** "AS FOR STRATAGEMS and effectual means to which thou canst have recourse in respect to these companions, there is one that consists in subduing the slack and gluttonous companion by the help of the one who is violent and malicious, and in forcing the former to retreat. Conversely, another way will be gradually to moderate the passion of the intolerable angry one by the seduction of the gentle and caressing companion, until he is completely pacified. As for the third companion, the fine talker skilled in fictions, beware of trusting him, of relying on his words, unless it befall that he bring thee some weighty testimony from God. In that case, yes, rely upon his words, receive what he tells thee. Beware, that is, of systematically suspecting all his words, turning a deaf ear to the news he brings thee, even though he mingle true with false therein, for, in it all, there cannot but be something to be received and investigated, something whose truth it is worth while to realize."

When he had thus described these companions to me, I found myself very ready to receive what he had taught me and to recognize that his words were true. Submitting my companions to trial and setting myself to observe them, [I found that] experience confirmed what I had been told of them. And now I am as much occupied with curing them as with submitting to them. Sometimes it is I who have the upper hand of them, sometimes they are stronger than I am. God grant that I may live on terms of good neighborhood with these companions until the time comes when I shall at last part from them!

9. THEN I ASKED the Sage to guide me on the road of the journey, to show me how to set out on a journey such as he himself was making. I addressed him in the fashion of a man who burned to do

140

Translation of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*

so, who had the greatest desire for it. He answered me: "Thou, and all those whose condition is like thine—you cannot set out on the journey that I am making. It is forbidden you; the road is closed to you all, unless thy fortunate destiny should aid thee, for thy part, to separate from these companions. But now the hour for that separation is not yet come: there is a time set for it, which thou canst not anticipate. For the present, then, thou must rest content with a journey interrupted by halts and inactivity; now thou wilt be on the road, now thou wilt frequent these companions. Each time that thou goest alone, pursuing thy journey with perfect ardor, I walk with thee, and thou art separated from them. Each time that thou sighest after them, thou turnest back toward them, and thou art separated from me; so shall it be until the moment comes when thou shalt break with them wholly."

10. FINALLY, the conversation led me to question him concerning each of the climes to which he had traveled, all those that were included in his knowledge and of which he was fully informed. He said to me: "The circumscriptions of the earth are threefold: one is intermediate between the Orient and the Occident. It is the best known; much information concerning it has reached thee and has been rightly understood. Notices even of the marvelous things contained in that clime have reached thee. But there are two other strange circumscriptions: one beyond the Occident, the other beyond the Orient. For each of them, there is a barrier preventing access from this world to that other circumscription, for no one can reach there or force a passage save the Elect among the mass of men, those who have gained a strength that does not originally belong to man by right of nature.

11. "WHAT AIDS in gaining this strength is to immerse oneself in the spring of water that flows near the permanent Spring of Life. When the pilgrim has been guided on the road to that spring, and then purifies himself in it and drinks of that sweet-tasting water, a new strength arises in his limbs, making him able to cross vast

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

deserts. The deserts seem to roll up before him. He does not sink in the waters of the ocean; he climbs Mount Qaf without difficulty, and its guards cannot fling him down into the abysses of hell."

**12** WE ASKED HIM to explain that spring to us more fully. He said: "Thou hast heard of the Darkness that forever reigns about the pole. Each year the rising sun shines upon it at a fixed time. He who confronts that Darkness and does not hesitate to plunge into it for fear of difficulties will come to a vast space, boundless and filled with light. The first thing he sees is a living spring whose waters spread like a river over the *barzakh*. Whoever bathes in that spring becomes so light that he can walk on water, can climb the highest peaks without weariness, until finally he comes to one of the two circumscriptions by which this world is intersected."

13. THEN I BEGGED HIM: "Teach me what the circumscription of the Occident is, for the Occident is nearer to our cities." He said to me: "At the uttermost edge of the Occident there is a vast sea, which in the Book of God is called the *Hot* (and Muddy) *Sea*. It is in those parts that the sun sets. The streams that fall into that sea come from an uninhabited country whose vastness none can circumscribe. No inhabitant peoples it; save for strangers who arrive there unexpectedly, coming from other regions. Perpetual Darkness reigns in that country. Those who emigrate there obtain a flash of light each time that the sun sinks to its setting. Its soil is a desert of salt. Each time that people settle there and begin to cultivate it, it refuses; it expels them, and others come in their stead. Would any grow a crop there? It is scattered. Is a building raised there? It crumbles. Among those people there is perpetual quarreling or, rather, mortal battle. Any group that is strongest seizes the homes and goods of the others and forces them to emigrate. They try to settle; but in their turn they reap only loss and harm. Such is their behavior. They never cease from it.

Translation of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*

"ALL KINDS of animals and plants appear in that country; but  
14. when they settle there, feed on its grass, and drink its water, suddenly they are covered by outsides strange to their Form. A human being will be seen there, for example, covered by the hide of a quadruped, while thick vegetation grows on him. And so it is with other species. And that clime is a place of devastation, a desert of salt, filled with troubles, wars, quarrels, tumults; there joy and beauty are but borrowed from a distant place.

"BETWEEN THAT CLIME and yours there **are** others. However,  
15. beyond this clime of yours, beginning at the region in which the Pillars of the Heavens are set, there is a clime that is like yours in several ways. In the first place, it is a desert plain; it too is peopled only by strangers come from distant places. Another similarity is that that clime borrows its light from a foreign source, though it is nearer to the Window of Light than the climes we have described hitherto. In addition, that clime serves as foundation for the heavens, just as the preceding clime serves as the seat for this earth, is its permanent base. On the other hand, the inhabitants who people that other clime are sedentaries there in perpetuity. Among the strangers who have come there and settled, there is no war; they do not seize each others' homes and goods by force. Each group has its fixed domain, into which no other comes to inflict violence upon it.

**16.** "IN RELATION to you, the nearest inhabited country of that clime is a region whose people are very small in stature and swift in their movements. Their cities are nine in number.

"After that region comes a kingdom whose inhabitants are even smaller in stature than the former, while their gait is slower. They passionately love the arts of the writer, the sciences of the stars, theurgy, magic; they have a taste for subtle occupations and deep works. Their cities number ten.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

"After that region comes a kingdom whose inhabitants are extremely beautiful and charming; they love gaiety and festivities; they are free from care; they have a refined taste for musical instruments, and know many kinds of them. A woman reigns over them as sovereign. A natural disposition inclines them to the good and the beautiful; when they hear of evil and ugliness, they are seized with disgust. Their cities number nine.

"Next comes a kingdom whose inhabitants are very tall in stature and extremely fair of face. The characteristic of their nature is that they are highly beneficial for whatever is at a distance, whereas their immediate neighborhood is calamitous. Their cities number five.

"Next comes a kingdom in which are settled people who bring destruction to the earth; they love to wound, kill, mutilate, make examples, for their diversion and amusement. Over them reigns a red personage always inclined to hurt, to kill, to strike. Sometimes, as the narrators of their chronicles report, he is seduced by the fair-faced queen whom we just mentioned and who inspires him with passionate love. Their cities number eight.

"After their country comes a vast kingdom whose inhabitants are endowed to the utmost with temperance, justice, wisdom, and piety, and bestow all necessary good on all parts of the universe. They maintain a compassionate friendship toward those who are near to them as toward those who are far from them; they extend their goodness to him who recognizes it as to him who knows it not. They are of extraordinary beauty and brightness. Their cities number eight.

"After that comes a country inhabited by a people whose thoughts are abstruse and inclined to evil. However, if they tend to goodness, they go to its utmost extreme. If they attack a troop, they do not lightly fling themselves upon it, but proceed in the fashion of a seducer full of wiles; they do not hurry over what they do, and do not refuse to wait for long periods. Their cities number eight.

"Next comes an immense kingdom, with great scattered countries. Its inhabitants are numerous. They are solitaires; they do not live in

Translation of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*

cities. Their abode is a desert plain where nothing grows. It is divided into twelve regions, which contain twenty-eight stations. No group goes up to occupy the station of another except when the group preceding it has withdrawn from its dwelling; then it hastens to replace it. All the migrants expatriated in the kingdoms that we have described hitherto travel about this kingdom and perform their evolutions there.

"Marching with it is a kingdom of which no one has descried or reached the boundaries down to this day. It contains neither city nor town. No one who is visible to the eyes of the body can find refuge there. Its inhabitants are the spiritual Angels. No human being can reach it nor dwell there. From it the divine Imperative and Destiny descend upon all those who occupy the degrees below. Beyond it there is no earth that is inhabited. In short, these two climes, to which the heavens and the earth are respectively joined, are on the left side of the universe, that which is the Occident.

"NOW, when thou proceedest toward the Orient, there first  
17. appears to thee a clime in which there is no inhabitant: neither human beings nor plants nor minerals. It is a vast desert, a flooding sea, imprisoned winds, a raging fire. Having crossed it, thou wilt come to a clime where thou wilt find immovable mountains, streams of living water, blowing winds, clouds that drop heavy rain. There thou wilt find native gold, silver, precious or base minerals of all kinds, but thou wilt find nothing that grows. Crossing it leads thee to a clime filled with the things already mentioned, but in which thou wilt also find all kinds of vegetation, plants and fruit trees and other trees, giving fruits with stones or seeds, but thou wilt find there no animal that whines or peeps. Leaving this clime in its turn, thou wilt enter another where thou wilt find all that was mentioned before, but also living creatures of every species not endowed with the logos, those that swim, those that crawl, those that walk, those that fly beating their wings and gliding, those that engender, and those that hatch, but no human beings

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

are there. Thou wilt escape from it into this world that is yours, and thou knowest already through sight and hearing what it contains.

**18.** "THEN, cutting straight across toward the Orient, thou wilt come upon the *sun rising* between the two troops [lit., the two "horns"] of the Demon. For the Demon has two troops: one that flies, another that plods. The troop that plods contains two tribes: a tribe that has the ferocity of beasts of prey, while the other has the bestiality of quadrupeds. Between the two there is perpetual war, and both dwell in the *left* side of the Orient. As for the demons who fly, their quarters are in the *right* side of the Orient. They are not all of the same constitution. Far from it, for one would say that each individual among them has his particular constitution, different from every other, so that some of them are constituted of two natures, others of three, others of four, as a flying man would be or a viper with a boar's head. Some of them too are but a half, others but a fragment of a nature, like an individual who should be only one half of a human being, or the palm of a hand, or a single foot, or any other corresponding part of an animal. One would almost think that the composite figures that painters represent come from this clime!

"The authority that governs the affairs of this clime has laid out five great roads there for the courier. It has made these roads so many fortified bulwarks for its kingdom, and has stationed men-at-arms upon them. If inhabitants of this world present themselves, the men-at-arms take them prisoners. They inspect all the baggage that the prisoners bring with them, then they deliver them to a Guardian who is in authority over the five men-at-arms and who stands watching at the threshold of that clime. The information that the captives bring and that is to be sent on is put into a letter on which a seal is placed, without the Guardian's knowing what the letter contains. Now, the duty that lies upon the Guardian is to send the letter on to a certain Treasurer, who will present it to the King. It is this same Treasurer who takes charge of the prisoners; as for their effects, he delivers them to

Translation of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*

another Treasurer for safekeeping. And each time that they take prisoners some troop from your world, whether of human beings, or of animals, or of other creatures, those creatures proliferate, whether by a happy mixture in which their forms are preserved or by engendering only abortions.

"SOMETIMES A GROUP from one of these two troops of demons  
19. sets out for your clime; there they surprise human beings, they insinuate themselves into their inmost hearts with their breath. As for the plodding tribe that resembles beasts of prey, it lies in wait for the moment when someone will do a man the slightest wrong. Then it stirs him up, shows him the worst actions in a fair light, such as killing, mutilating, ruining, inflicting suffering. It nourishes hatred in the secrecy of his heart; it urges him to oppress and destroy. As for the second of the two plodding tribes, it never leaves off talking secretly to a man, beautifying sins, unworthy acts, and scoundrelly behavior; it inspires him to desire them, gives him a taste for them; riding the mount of obstinacy, it persists until it has succeeded in swaying him. As for the flying troop, it leads a man to declare that everything he does not see with his bodily eyes is false; it persuades him that it is excellent to adore what is only the work of nature or made by men; it suggests to his heart that after this earthly life there is no birth into another world, nor consequences for the good and the evil, and finally that there is no being who reigns eternally in the celestial kingdom.

20. "SEVERING THEMSELVES from these two demoniac troops, there are, however, some groups who haunt the frontiers of a certain clime lying next after that inhabited by the *terrestrial angels*. Letting themselves be guided by these angels, they find the straight road; thus they depart from the aberrancy of the demons and choose the road of the *spiritual Angels*. When these *daimons* mingle with men it is neither to corrupt nor to misguide them; on the contrary, they beneficently



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

help them to become pure. These are the 'fairies' or 'genii' [peri], those who in Arabic are called *jinn* and *hinn*.

**21.** "HE WHO SUCCEEDS in leaving this clime<sup>23</sup> enters the climes of the Angels, among which the one that marches with the earth is a clime in which the terrestrial angels dwell. These angels form two groups. One occupies the right side: they are the angels who know and order. Opposite them, a group occupies the left side: they are the angels who obey and act. Sometimes these two groups of angels descend to the climes of men and genii, sometimes they mount to heaven. It is said that among their number are the two angels to whom the human being is entrusted, those who are called 'Guardians and Noble Scribes'—one to the right, the other to the left. He who is to the right belongs to the angels who order; to him it falls to dictate. He who is to the left belongs to the angels who act; to him it **falls** to write.

**22** "HE WHO IS TAUGHT a certain road leading out of this clime and who is helped to accomplish this exodus, such a one will find an egress to what is beyond the celestial spheres. Then, in a fugitive glimpse, he descries the posterity of the Primordial Creation, over whom rules as king the One, the Obeyed.

"There, the first delimitation is inhabited by intimates of that sublime King; they ever assiduously pursue the work that brings them near to their King. They are a most pure people, who respond to no solicitation of gluttony, lust, violence, jealousy, or sloth. The mission laid upon them is to attend to the preservation of the ramparts of that empire, and it is there that they abide. Hence they live in cities; they occupy lofty castles and magnificent buildings, whose material was kneaded with such care that the result is a compound that in no wise resembles the clay of your clime. Those buildings are more solid than diamond and jacinth, than all things that require the longest time to wear away. Long life has been bestowed upon that people; they are

23. *Iqlim*, plural *aqalim*, Arabic transposition of the Greek word *klima*.

Translation of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*

exempt from the due date of death; death cannot touch them until after a long, a very long term. Their rule of life consists in maintaining the ramparts in obedience to the order given them.

"Above them is a people that has more intimate dealings with the King and that is unceasingly bound to His service. They are not humiliated by having to fill this office; their state is preserved against all attack, nor do they change their occupation. They were chosen to be intimates, and they have received the power of contemplating the highest palace and stationing themselves all about it. It has been granted them to contemplate the face of the King in unbroken continuity. They have received as adornment the sweetness of a subtle grace in their nature, goodness and penetrating wisdom in their thoughts, the privilege of being the final term to which all knowledge refers. They have been endowed with a shining aspect, a beauty that sets the beholder trembling with admiration, a stature that has attained its perfection. For each of them, a limit has been set that belongs to him alone, a fixed rank, a divinely ordained degree, to which no other contests his right and in which he has no associate, for all the others either are above him or each respectively finds sweetness in his lower rank. Among them there is one whose rank is nearer to the King, and he is their 'father,' and they are his children and grandchildren. It is through him that the King's word and order emanate to them. And among other marvels pertaining to their condition is this: never does the course of time expose their nature to the marks and witherings of age and decrepitude. Far from it, he among them who is their 'father,' though the oldest in duration, is thereby all the more abounding in vigor, and his face has all the more of the beauty of youth. They all live in the desert; they have no need of dwelling places or shelter.

"AMONG THEM ALL the King is the most withdrawn into that

**23.**

solitude. Whoever connects Him with an origin errs. Whoever claims to pay Him praise that is proportionate to Him is an idle babler. For the King escapes the power of the clever to bestow qualifications, just as here too all comparisons fail of their end. Let none,

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

then, be so bold as to compare Him to anything whatsoever. He has no members that divide Him: He is all a face by His beauty, all a hand by His generosity. And His beauty obliterates the vestiges of all other beauty. His generosity debases the worth of all other generosity. When one of those who surround His immensity undertakes to meditate on Him, his eye blinks with stupor and he comes away dazzled. Indeed, his eyes are almost ravished from him, even before he has turned them upon Him. It would seem that His beauty is the veil of His beauty, that His Manifestation is the cause of His Occultation, that His Epiphany is the cause of His Hiddenness. Even so, it is by veiling itself a little that the sun can be the better contemplated; when, on the contrary, the heliophany sheds all the violence of its brightness, the sun is denied to the eyes, and that is why its light is the veil of its light. In truth, the King manifests His beauty on the horizon of those who are His; toward them He is not niggardly of His vision; those who are deprived of contemplating Him are so because of the wretched state of their faculties. He is mild and merciful. His generosity overflows. His goodness is immense. His gifts overwhelm; vast is His court, universal His favor. Whoever perceives a trace of His beauty fixes his contemplation upon it forever; never again, even for the twinkling of an eye, does he let himself be distracted from it.

"SOMETIMES certain solitaries among men emigrate toward  
24. Him. So much sweetness does He give them to experience that they bow under the weight of His graces. He makes them conscious of the wretchedness of the advantages of your terrestrial clime. And when they return from His palace, they return laden with mystical gifts."

THEN THE SAGE HAYY IBN YAQZAN said to me: "Were it not  
25. that in conversing with thee I approach that King by the very fact that I incite thy awakening, I should have to perform duties toward Him that would take me from thee. Now, if thou wilt, follow me, come with me toward Him. Peace."

### 13. *Orientation*

The word "orientation" precisely corresponds to the intention and the final invitation of the recital we have just read: to reveal the *Orient* in the true sense, then to *orient* the mystical pilgrim toward that Orient. More simply, our task would be to bring out the main lines of the recital, the variations in the field of vision, the succession of the episodes, the grouping of the leitmotifs. We should have liked to present a diagram of the mental exploration of the cosmos in company with Hayy ibn Yaqzan, such as has sometimes been made for *The Divine Comedy* and other visionary recitals. After many attempts, we confess that we arrived at no really satisfying design. The reader who will make the experiment in his turn will easily understand why. For the moment, then, we shall renounce such a schematization. On the other hand, the preceding chapters will already have brought out the fundamental themes of the text and the Persian commentary; so that here we may merely emphasize certain essential thematizations. This sketch will not duplicate the commentary translated elsewhere. As we shall have occasion to repeat, these commentaries display a common fault in deciphering the symbols of our recital as if with the help of a "code." They disregard the entirely different mode of perception that apprehends sensible or imaginable data and transmutes them into symbols. Instead of taking the recital in its phase of noetic transmutation, they as it were force it to retrogress by reducing its symbolic perceptions to the patencies and propositions of natural knowledge, that of the didactic treatises. Making every effort to reconvert its symbols into rational patencies, they end by degrading them into allegories. Our Iranian, though he often succumbs to this type of effort, is still the commentator in whom this particular fault is least marked.

In the recital as a whole we can distinguish a succession of *seven* episodes:

(1) *The Encounter with the Angel* (chs. 1-4). This episode comprises the prologue setting forth the preliminary conditions for the vision (when the soul is withdrawn, "at home"), then the appearance of the "Sage," the revelation of his name and person, the joy experienced by the visionary.

The whole episode is thus concerned with the person of Hayy ibn Yaqzan, and brings us back to the considerations previously developed here. As such, this initial episode constituted by the manifestation of the *Angelus interpretis* indicates the typological kinship of the Avicennan recital: in general, all visionary recitals begin in the same way. Hayy ibn Yaqzan here plays the same

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

role as do the Archangel Gabriel in the visions of Daniel, Raphael or Michael in those of Enoch, the Archangel Uriel in IV Esdras,<sup>24</sup> etc. Similarly too, the Archangel Gabriel will be the spiritual guide in any recital of *Mi'raj* (cf. above, § 14); and Hayy ibn Yaqzan as individuation of the Active Intelligence, itself identified with the Archangel Gabriel, constitutes its "angelophany" for the mental iconography associated with such an experience.

In regard to the experimental significance of this angelophany, two things must be recalled: the *aspect* of the person visualized (whether imaginatively or ecstatically) and the *implications* of such a visualization. As for the aspect of the person mentally *seen*, the narrator here describes his features with a care that reveals a certain esthetic emotion. As we have had occasion to remark, the word *pir* is not used here to connote the physical characteristics that would be suggested by translating it "old man." In addition, the text expressly mentions that the Angels never become *pirs*. It is not "age" to which the word refers, since the eternal duration of the beings of the pleroma can in no way impair the constitution of their being. To preserve the force of the symbol, as well as to avoid the absurd imagery of translations indifferent to their object, we must fix our attention on the *coincidentia oppositorum* that the visionary sought to bring out in the features of the celestial apparition: the beauty and brightness of extreme youth combined with the gravity of "old Sages."

We have elsewhere referred to recent researches on the symbol of the *Puer aeternus*,<sup>25</sup> who is as such the symbol of the totality of a being: the perfection already consummated by age coexisting with the eternal *not-yet* of eternal youth. The vision of this totality announced by the soul's celestial being presupposes that the soul has passed through the long ordeal of the *renatus in novam infantiam*; only then can the celestial being make itself visible in this Image, because the latter is precisely the *mirror* that, under these conditions, the soul presents to it. We shall see later (§ 21) that the perfect gnostic '(arif) becomes just such a mirror; this will be the extreme case typified in Absal. At the moment—that is, during the unit of time—in which this Image becomes visible to the soul (in the mirror that is itself),<sup>26</sup> the soul is absent from this world,

24. Cf. Bietenhard, *Die himmlische Welt*, p. 249. We earlier pointed out (pp. 22-23) a similar angelophany in the case of Hermes (*Poimandres*) and in the case of *The Shepherd of Hermas*.

25. Cf. p. 285, n. 3 (C. G. Jung, "The Psychology of the Child Archetype").

26. This mirror is actually the upper face of the soul, its *intellectus contemplativus*, which is the angelophanic "place" of Hayy ibn Yaqzan. On the other hand, toward the *intellectus practicus* it is in a relation similar to that of Hayy ibn Yaqzan to himself. It is in this twofold sense **that** we may say **that**

## Orientation

"dies" invisibly to this world, because it is *awakened* to the invisible world.<sup>27</sup>

As for the implications of the vision, they are those that we already attempted to analyze earlier (above, § 8). To summarize them, we shall add to our citations a passage from Philo that is an excellent description of this hierophanic situation. Making a fortunate error supported by the Septuagint, Philo comments on a passage from Genesis (XXXI:13) where he reads: "*I am the God who showed himself to thee in the place of God.*"<sup>28</sup> This "in the place of" formulates the phenomenological motivation of all hierophanies. For Philo explains that to souls still in a body, God shows Himself under the form of an Angel, not that His proper nature then changes in itself, but because each soul receives the impression of His presence under a different form, with no thought that this "icon" is an imitation but firmly assured that it is contemplating the archetypal form itself.<sup>29</sup> This is precisely the case of theophanic individuation described in the *Acts of Peter*, which we quoted earlier (above, pp. 92-93), because this is the typical situation to which the experience of our visionary recitals corresponds.

It is intentionally, however, that we just repeated the term "individuation." For, whether in the case of God Himself or of an Angel possessing a "universal function," the one-to-one vision postulates the individuation that Philo describes by saying that the soul has the feeling that it is contemplating not an imitation but the archetype itself. The word "individuation" adds one more factor. For Philo's text would warrant an explanation that would be only an evasion, consisting in saying that the hierophany specified by the mode of being of the

the contemplative intellect "shows" Hayy ibn Yaqzan, or that the first of the terrestrial angels typifies the celestial Self (cf. above, p. 87, n. 94). These explanations must be added to what we say on pp. 358-59, n. 1, which could lead to confusion. Compare, in Hermeticism, the *Nous* understood on the one hand as a faculty of the soul, on the other as an Angel or personal divinity, *Agathos Daimon* (cf. our "Cyclical Time," p. 141). Homologically here, in the first case the first of the terrestrial angels (the contemplative intellect) can typify Hayy ibn Yaqzan. In the second case we have two different Figures: the Active Intelligence is typified in the person of Hayy ibn Yaqzan, while the

contemplative **intellect** of the soul will be typified, as terrestrial angel, in the person of Absal (cf. below, ch. v).

27. We have already (above, pp. 65-66) brought the name Yaqzan (Watcher), the "father" of Hayy (Living), into relation with the name of the Angels who *sleep not*, the "Watchers" (*Egregoroi*) of the books of Enoch. The soul, by awakening, becomes like them.

28. Actually, the Greek *topos Theou* translates the Hebrew *Bethel*, a place name; cf. Philo, *De somniis*, I, 229 (ed. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, V, 418).

29. Philo, *De somniis*, I, 232 (ibid., V, 418-20).

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

soul is in sum only a point of view on the divine being, a *relative* image. Such an evasion would overlook just the fact that the individuation of a relation necessarily, and by the fact itself, individuates the two terms of the relation. If we may still grasp this individuation from the soul's side, it is obviously impossible for us to describe what it is on the side of the divinity in itself. But such are precisely the mystery and the meaning of the Angel. Since we cannot grasp the divine being in its immutability or in any of its other qualities, it really does not appear why an "explanation" of the Angel must conclude that he is ontologically null on the pretense of explaining him.

The figure of Hayy ibn Yaqzan, the Sage-youth as "hierophany" of the Active Intelligence, seems to have imposed itself upon Avicenna's inner life, to have become an integral part of the spiritual life of the master qua philosopher, as that of the *spiritus rector* in whose company he lived, in accordance with the teaching of the present recital. We find testimony to this in another treatise, the treatise on *Destiny*.<sup>30</sup> A short introduction sets the stage: the philosopher, returning to Ispahan, is breaking his journey at the house of a friend, whose characterology is so well sketched that the story becomes, in its turn, a symbolic recital. Avicenna's friend, that is, is a person with a passion for discussion, convinced that Truth can be attained by exchange of arguments, in short, by the way of dialectic, *Kalam*. Avicenna's visit to his friend is, then, an excellent occasion to open a hopeless argument on such a theme as destiny. As always, such a conversation ends in an impasse; the arguments exchanged have made no change in destiny; there is nothing to do but to fall silent. It is now, out of the depths of this silence, on the threshold of inmost consciousness, that the person of Hayy ibn Yaqzan suddenly presents itself. "Lo, in the distance a 'silhouette'<sup>31</sup> showed itself. I soon discerned its aspect. By God, I said, that silhouette has all the appearance of Hayy ibn Yaqzan!" Hayy ibn Yaqzan having thus appeared in the landscape of helpless consciousness, he alone must be left to discourse on a subject that leaves those who argue impotent.

(2) *The Initiation* (chs. 5-8) or, rather, the *initium* of the initiation. The conversation with Hayy ibn Yaqzan has proceeded for some time before the *initial* science is broached, for many and difficult questions, which the recital unfortunately does not impart to us, have already been treated. The reader may feel rather surprised at first when he learns that the science that is to be the

30. Cf. Mehren, *Traites*, fasc. 4, p. I.

31. Read *shabh* instead of *shaykh*; the

word is as characteristic of these visions as copyists' confusions of it are frequent.

## Orientation

point of departure is none other than "physiognomy" (*'ilm-e firasat*). But it is referred to as a science in which Hayy ibn Yaqzan excels to a degree that fills his disciple with admiration; the commentator emphasizes this by saying that it is indeed a science in which Angels excel. If, then, the following paragraphs develop the idea of a physiognomy that is simply the intuitive science whose practice here is in conformity with the *Imago mundi* that it implies, we may well ask whether a more profound conception is not also implied.

In short, it is a question of perceiving, of bringing out, the hidden depth of man, his *batin*, his authentic soul, and of reducing, causing the disappearance of, the apparent, the *zahir*, the whole apparatus of faculties and powers, and of appearances secreted by those powers, that envelop the soul and turn it from that for which it is made. Ultimately, it is a question of causing the appearance of the soul, of the Stranger or the *Oriental* hidden under the *Occidental* disguise of the common condition. Physiognomy here proclaims itself an exemplification of *ta'wil*, not of a simple *ta'wil* of texts, but of what we have called a "*ta'wil* of the soul" (cf. above, § 3). And "to eclipse the apparent, to manifest the hidden," will also be the program of an alchemy that, in turn, proves to be pre-eminently a case of *ta'wil*, the soul projecting its desires and its ordeals into operations that are actually performed on matter and whose effects it transmutes into symbols of its own inner transmutations.<sup>32</sup>

Thus physiognomy, a science in which the Angel excels, justifies itself as point of departure, as *initium* of the work of transmutation. And since transmutation presupposes a new way of perceiving and reflecting on the world, its effect is perceptible even from this initial lesson. What ordinary philosophical knowledge perceives as an apparatus of faculties at the disposition of the soul is henceforth perceived through an Image that transmutes them into symbols. The commentator, on the contrary, will tend to reduce these symbols to the data of current perception; it is here that his *ta'wil*, instead of leading these data back to their true origin through the mediation of the symbol—instead, consequently, of completing the transmutation begun by the *ta'wil* that symbolic perceptions already constitute—will seek to reduce symbolic perceptions to the level of the ordinary mode of perception; his commentary, then, accomplishes no more than to expound a lesson in psychology such as can be found in the *Shifa'* or in any other didactic treatise. Symbolic perception, on the other hand, transmutes these powers of the soul into *dramatis personae* and transmutes their

32. Cf. our "Le 'Livre du Glorieux' de Jabir ibn Hayyan," pp. 75 ff., and below, p. 296, n. 1.



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

activity into a dramaturgy that is no longer on the level of a theoretical treatise.

Hence the concupiscible and irascible appetites are no longer the theme of an innocuous descriptive chapter. They are two *personages*, two redoubtable companions: the *demons* of the soul. . . . This is why we shall find that the true commentary on this fifth section is given later by Avicenna himself, as part of the text of his recital (chs. 18 ff.). It is not somewhere in the world, it is in the kingdom, at the "rising sun," of the human soul that these demons are encountered. They are the "left side," the *Occidental* darkness in the *Orient* of the soul. They are not simply two partial faculties reproduced in every individual; they are psychic Energies, the mass of demonic energies that multiply in the human soul, alert for every occasion to convert the terrestrial angels to their hell and to destroy in them the virtuality, and even the instinct, of paradisaal existence (cf. ch. 19). In the *Recital of Salaman and Absal*, the two companions will reappear, typified, not without humor, in the figures of the cook and the major-domo. With them are all the fanaticisms, the ambitions and violences, all the egotisms, the cowardices, and the compromises that tempt the soul, and then persecute the "gnostic" who has scorned them, even to the point of causing the death of Absal, *the* hero-archetype. Not that it is in their power to destroy his person. Absal's mystical death is the success of his initiation, his triumph over these demons: it is *to them* that he dies, and thereby it is *their* power that dies. Then Salaman can exterminate them in his turn; the "celestial Angels" can flower on the celestial soil of the soul. This link between the two Avicennan recitals needs to be brought out at this point, for it testifies to the unity of their design and their experience.

We may further note the favorable reservation accorded to the active Imagination (ch. 8), a *personage* who will reappear among those particular demons of the soul that the soul is to change into "genii" by drawing them to the "clime of the terrestrial angels" (ch. 20). For this Imagination, Suhrawardi will say, can be angel *or* demon. It is in the work of *ta'wil*, in the perception of symbols, that it is converted to the former of these roles. In the presence of these perspectives, we understand why this second episode ends in the solemn tone of a prayer (ch. 8).

(3) *The Quest for the Orient* (chs. 9-12). The gnostic, whom we can henceforth call Absal, the name by which Avicenna designates his person-archetype—Absal, then, having been instructed in these things, can put the essential *question*: what is the Way? Show it to me. And the whole secret of the quest is contained in the few words of the answer: "When thou goest alone, when thou

## Orientation

art separated from these companions, I walk with thee." It is not now possible for Absal to accompany the Angel to the goal; but to be his companion now is to anticipate his eternal companionship; mystical death, initiation into the exodus from the cosmic crypt, anticipates natural death and abolishes its solitude. Thereupon Hayy ibn Yaqzan imparts a threefold teaching. *Where* is Absal who questions him? Halfway between Orient and Occident. *Where* will he gain the strength to reach the Orient? By purifying himself and quenching his thirst at the Spring of Life. Finally, *where* is that spring?

Here, then, the orientation is given. In a gesture that embraces the horizons, the Angel points out what is still beyond, beyond the Orient and the Occident of the terrestrial clime. He will later describe these forbidden regions at greater length. Now his gesture repeats a gesture that, long before Avicenna's recital, had shown all "gnostics" that there is an *Orient* and an Occident of the cosmos, and that the meaning of their present life depends on these. This is the very thing that defines the close kinship between all "gnostics," and that can put us on the road to the "Oriental philosophy."

This *orientation* was already given to the mystai of Orphism. It is in the poem of Parmenides in which, guided by the daughters of the sun, the poet undertakes a "journey to the light," a journey into the Orient.<sup>33</sup> The distinction between the two directions, right and left, Orient and Occident of the cosmos, is fundamental in Valentinian Gnosticism.<sup>34</sup> To go to the right is to go upward, toward the Orient, which is the abode of pure beings of light over whom the Angel Sabaoth reigns, in the *Pistis Sophia*. Among all Gnostic texts, it is undoubtedly the celebrated "Hymn of the Soul" in the *Acts of Thomas* that most strikingly prefigures not only, as has been observed, Parsifal's quest but also Suhrawardi's *Recital of Occidental Exile* in its dramaturgy and Avicenna's recitals in their fundamental conception.

The Hymn tells of a young prince whom his parents send from the Orient, his native country, to Egypt to obtain possession of the matchless pearl. The youth departs from the *Orient*, puts off the robe of light that his parents, in their love, had woven for him, and journeys to Egypt. There he finds himself alone; he is the Stranger, the unknown (cf. above, § 2). But he comes upon "one of his own race, a freeman, an *Oriental*." He himself puts on the same garments as the Egyptians, so that he shall not be suspected. Yet he is divined to be the Stranger, he who is not *of this world*. He is given food that blots out his memory,

83. Cf. Leisegang, *Die Gnosis*, pp. 136 f.

34. Ibid., pp. 316, 320, 363.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

he forgets that he is the "son of a king." Then, just as in the Suhrawardian recital, a message reaches him from his father, his mother the queen of the Orient, and his brother (his celestial *paredros*). All the nobles of Parthia have signed it (this way of designating the princes of the celestial pleroma clearly denotes the Iranian connections of the recital, which is one of the most beautiful of the texts that have come down to us from Manichaean Gnosticism). The young prince remembers his royal origin and the pearl for which he had been sent to Egypt; he takes possession of it, casts off his impure garments, and sets out straight for the *Orient*. He is guided on his way by the message he had received, which he calls his Awakener (compare Hayy ibn Yaqzan!). When he reaches the frontier of the *Orient*, he resumes his mysterious robe of light, in which we can clearly see his celestial archetype, his Fravarti.<sup>35</sup>

This is only a hasty summary, but we did not wish to confine ourselves to a mere reference, for it seems necessary that this recital should be available to the reader, at least in outline, so that he may meditate on it in conjunction with the Avicennan recitals. The *Orient* of Avicenna and Suhrawardi will then prove not to be an absolute innovation; if we would obtain a clearer concept of it, and at the same time clarify the concept of an "Oriental" philosophy or wisdom, and of an "Oriental" religion, we cannot neglect what there is in common between the representation that *orients* the *gnostic* of the *Acts of Thomas* and the representation that *orients* the *gnostic*, the '*arif*', of Avicenna and Suhrawardi.

Now, the question *whence*, in order thus to *orient* themselves, the "Elect among the mass of mankind" draw a force that they owe not to their natural birth but to a second birth, we shall find answered in terms that connect the initiation here given by Hayy ibn Yaqzan with the symbols of Gnosticism and Hermeticism. We have elsewhere referred<sup>36</sup> to recurrences of the symbol of the Water of Life, the permanent Water (*Aqua vitae*, *Aqua permanens*, in the vocabulary of the alchemists). There is a close connection between the theme of the message from the "Orient" and regeneration through this mystical Water, for it is to such a regeneration that the message is a summons. This is shown, among many other examples, by the following passage from the Hermetic corpus; it is, furthermore, a text that we shall do well to meditate upon here for a perception of the overtones of our Avicennan recitals. "He appointed a herald and bade him make proclamation to the hearts of men: 'Dip yourself

35. Ibid., pp. 248-49, and James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 411-15.

cf. also Mircea Eliade, *Images et symboles*, pp. 199 ff. (on the symbolism of Water).

36. See p. 321, n. 1, and p. 324, n. 2;

in this basin, if you can, recognizing for what purpose you have been made, and believing that you shall ascend to Him who sent the basin down.' Now those who gave heed to the proclamation, and dipped themselves in the bath of mind, these men got a share of *gnosis*; they received mind, and so became complete men." <sup>37</sup>

But *where* is this spring? To follow the text, in agreement with our commentator, we can say that it is "situated" at the ideal point of the insertion of Form into Matter (cf. translation of the commentary, p. 320), at the point where Form descends like "the setting sun" to the Occident of Matter—hence at the frontier between Orient and Occident, at the birthplace and meeting point of the ideal curves that surround and delimit the intermediate region, our mixed world.

This ideal place is termed the *pole*, around which perpetual Darkness reigns (ch. 12). Here our Iranian commentator has a deep and true insight: this Darkness<sup>38</sup> is ignorance or, more precisely, unconsciousness of ignorance—that is to say, the natural man is in a state of ignorance and cannot even be conscious of that state. To free himself from it, he must pass through the Darkness; this is a terrifying and painful experience, for it ruins and destroys all the patencies and norms on which the natural man lived and depended—a true "descent into hell," the hell of the unconscious. Symbolic perception here meets with today's depth psychology. That our Iranian commentator discerned the psychic event, the redoubtable initiation into knowledge in the true sense, into the saving gnosis, is greatly to his credit.

This minimizes his *ta'wil*, which now undertakes to reduce the psychic event partly to the study and practice of Logic. But this perhaps also valorizes it, for at the same time Logic is raised to an initiatory plane not foreseen by the technical expositions of this science acquired "in view of . . . knowledge in the true sense" (translation, p. 323). Perhaps we should recall that the preface to the *Mantiq al-Mashriqiyyin* speaks of another name that Logic was said to have borne among the "Orientals." It is this lofty significance of Logic that Mir Damad has in mind in the letter, referred to earlier,<sup>39</sup> in which he says

37. *Corpus hermeticum*, IV, 4; ed. Nock and tr. Festugiere, I, 50, and the references given, *ibid.*, I, 53-54, nn. 9-11 (water here on earth different from the living water of the Good, in which the "pneumatics" and the "living" are washed. (The English translation given above is Scott's, in his

*Hermetica*, I, 151.) Cf. also, in the Gnostic *Pistis Sophia*, IV, 334, the post-mortem baptism of souls by the seven Virgins of Light.

38. Cf. below, p. 325, nn. 3-4.

39. Cf. above, p. 128, n. 9.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

that among the symbols that have been given for Logic (and which consequently raise the concept of it to the level of symbolic perception) one names it *istikshaf*. This term means "to attempt to bare and unveil"; it is precisely the "quest for revelation"; it would thus correspond to *istishraq*, a term that Suhrawardi employs and that is precisely the "quest for the Orient"—that is, for the Ishraq, the Orient of Divine Lights.<sup>40</sup> In addition, Mir Damad refers in his letter to a long passage in Qutbaddin Shirazi's commentary on the prologue to the *Hikmat al-Ishraq*,<sup>41</sup> where, as an introduction to the Suhrawardian concept of Logic, Qutbaddin quotes *in full* ch. 11 of our *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, in agreement with our commentator and with Mir Damad, we can understand that the Spring of Life, the *Aqua permanens*, is divine gnosis, the *philosophia prima*. He who purifies himself therein and drinks of it will never taste the bitterness of death.<sup>43</sup> As for the spring of *running* Water hard by the *permanent* spring, we may see in it a typification of Logic as being not a part but one of the derivatives (*furu*) of the divine science. But this on an express condition that safeguards instead of degrading symbolic perception: it is Logic that must be raised to the horizon of this symbolic perception. In other words: it is not Logic that is the *ta'wil* of the spring of running Water; it is, conversely, the spring of running Water that is the *ta'wil* of Logic, that, as such, "leads it back" to its "spring," to its meaning and its truth (*haqiqat*).

By maintaining this absolute rule that ensures the valorization instead of the decline of symbols, we can in our turn valorize certain connections in the commentary. It is not by chance that the long development occasioned by ch. 9 contains important considerations on *ta'wil*, among them a critique that, though

40. The Arabic present participle *mustashriq* is the term in current use for "orientalist" (of which the Persian equivalent is *khavar-shanas*). It goes without saying that, if the word is taken in the sense in which Suhrawardi and the Ishraqiyun understood it (cf. our "Prolegomenes I," p. xxxii), "orientalists" become subject to responsibilities that they were far from suspecting!

41. This development comes after p. 13 of our edition; by it Qutbaddin introduces the compendium of Logic elaborated by Suhrawardi at the beginning of the first part of the *Hikmat al-Ishraq*; in view of its length, we could not include it in our edition of the

text. We intend to return to it on the occasion of our French translation and commentary.

42. Cf. lith. (Teheran, A.H. 1315), p. 30.

43. "Wa-'aynu'l-hayawani'r-rakidatu allati man ightamara fiha—bal man tagham-mara min ma'iha—lam yamut wa-lam yadhuq mararata'l-mawti abadan, hiya'l-falsafatu'luwla wa-hiya'l-'ilmu'l-ilahi . . ." (MS. Tabataba'i 1284): ". . . he who drinks of this Water dies no more and shall never taste the bitterness of death . . ."; these are almost the words of St. John's Gospel (IV:14).

## Orientation

it does not say so, is aimed at the Ismailian conception and that is far from being decisive.<sup>44</sup> But what is important is the connection established between angelology and mystical experience, between the quest for the Orient in company with the Angel and the institution or perception of the world of symbols. The soul, falling asleep to sensible things and natural patencies, awakens to the perception of higher modes of being, those of the celestial world; it becomes conscious of the world of the Angel (translation, pp. 310-11 and 317-18). Despite the critique of the Ismailian *ta'wil*, the state to which the soul is led is a state in which the revealed letter, the *zahir*, assumes a hidden meaning for it, the meaning that is *Haqiqat* (cf. *ibid.*, p. 314). Doubtless the philosophical gnostic cannot accept a *ta'wil* whose secret is held back as the privilege of a dynasty, even a spiritual dynasty; yet it is certainly to a *ta'wil* that is a personal *ta'wil* (*ta'wil shakhsi*) that the gnostic is led by the Angel when he awakens to consciousness of the world of the Angel. And this birth to the world of symbols, this higher mode of perception presupposed by such a birth, is certainly also an aspect of regeneration by the Spring of Life.

Once the soul has emerged from Darkness, once it has risen from the abyss of unconsciousness, the first thing that presents itself is the living spring whose water flows out over the *barzakh* (ch. 12).<sup>45</sup> The word itself, which is not explained here, suggests that we make a connection between the thaumaturgies described by the commentator among the implications of the journey with the Angel (pp. 311-13) and those that the recital itself describes as consequences of the mystical bath in the Water that flows from the Spring of Life (ch. 11). For changing the appearances of things, walking on water, climbing Mount Qaf, all falls in the category of events that Suhrawardi mentions as taking place in the "intermediate Orient."<sup>46</sup> In other words, they are psychic events whose scene and action are set in neither the sensible nor the intelligible worlds, but in the intermediate world of the Imaginable, the *'alam al-mithal*, as it is called, or world of symbol and of typifications, *the place* of all visionary recitals. Now, this world is also called *barzakh* as interval extending between the intelligible and the sensible. It is the world "in which spirits are corporealized and bodies spiritualized." Whence the full signification of the episode

44. For this passage, cf. p. 314 ff., nn. 13-16.

45. On this word ("screen," "barrier," "interval") and Ibn Zayla's rather infelicitous gloss, which retrogresses to the plane

of a mere theory of knowledge, cf. p. 324, n. 1.

46. Cf. especially our edition of the "Metaphysics" from the *Mutarahat*, pp. 504 ff., § 224.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

appears as follows: emerging from the Spring of Life is emerging to the limit where consciousness and transconsciousness intersect, to the limit where ideal Form and sensible Matter, Orient and Occident, unite. And this is precisely being at the limit where the intelligible is declared in symbols, and where the sensible is transmuted into symbols: the limit at which *ta'wil* maintains itself and at which the active Imagination acts as organ of metamorphoses. Far more could be said; this brief treatment will suffice to "orient" among the manifold implications of this decisive episode.

(4) *The Occident* (chs. 13-16). This region situates the "left" of the cosmos; we now know that it comprises all being and all beings that are connected with any kind of matter. It is perceived under a threefold aspect: (1) the *farthest Occident* of nonbeing—not of pure nothingness, but of privation of being, of pure virtuality, perceived as the Hot Sea shrouded in Darkness that was the farthest point attained by Alexander's quest;<sup>47</sup> (2) the *terrestrial Occident*, where Forms that have emigrated and been exiled into Matter ruthlessly contend against one another; (3) the *celestial Occident*, which comprises the entire system of the spheres (cf. above, § 9), and whose matter is entirely different in condition from, the matter of the terrestrial Occident: subtle, diaphanous, incorruptible, "glorious" in comparison with ours. Hence no contention occurs there; yet the *Animae coelestes* are "strangers" there too. The reader will remember that the celestial matter of the spheres proceeds from the thought of an Angel meditating upon his wholly virtual nonbeing, the pure possibility contained in his being. In Suhrawardian terms, the celestial matter is "the grief" of the Angel, but it is also what offers the celestial Soul the means of satisfying its longing, of approaching the perfection that it does not yet possess.

Only one aspect of this celestial Occident demands our particular attention. The long ch. 16 outlines a planetary anthropology, a physiognomy, and a characterology that are in accordance with the presuppositions of astrology and the related sciences. This raises a problem,<sup>48</sup> which is not quite the one that Mehren solved by omitting this paragraph in his translation, alleging that, since Avicenna had criticized astrology elsewhere, he could not be held responsible for this "concession" here. After all, Avicenna has quite other claims to renown than that of having so thoroughly cast off the "prejudices of his time" that he deserved to belong to ours, which, as everyone knows, is entirely free from

47. Cf. p. 325, n. 4; p. 327, nn. 1-2.

48. Cf. p. 336, n. 1.

## Orientation

prejudices and preconceived opinions, in its sciences as in everything else. In fact, Avicenna's epistle against astrology, studied by Mehren,<sup>49</sup> warrants a bolder development than this artless *satisfecit*.

What Avicenna brings against astrology as constituted "in his time" is **its** primarily utilitarian purpose; and still more the arbitrariness of its schematizations, the insufficiency of the data on which it operates, and, despite these shortcomings, the systematic procedure of its conclusions. But Avicennism would cease to be Avicennism if the thought of interrupting the relations between the heavens and the earth could be imputed to it; its *Imago mundi* saves it from isolating terrestrial man, the microcosm, in the cosmos. What Avicenna objects against the astrologers of his day is not so much the so-called utter absurdity of their premises, so tirelessly demonstrated by modern and rational minds, which have long since exhausted the subject. His objection is, rather, that their science travesties its real task, fails of its end and its *raison d'être* through the ridiculous insufficiency of its data and its hasty schematizations. He reminds them by whom—Angels and Souls—the celestial motions are caused; there are acts of intelligence, of will and desire, of imagination and love, in the heavens. Each of the celestial Souls can act upon our souls in a particular way. The astrologers are satisfied with seven planets; but we already know, Avicenna reminds them, that we must reckon some sixty spheres, concentric or eccentric (cf. above, § 9); perhaps even every fixed star has its sphere and hence its Soul. And what of the variations in the receptacles of the celestial influxes? The impression we receive is that the great fault of the astrologers of his time lies in having constituted only an "Occidental" science, in having calculated only a play of material, automatic, and limited influences, causal connections, and constant necessities in the relations between the heavens and earth. For his part, by recalling that the celestial motions are acts of will and love, Avicenna in sum suggests that these relations be considered "on the Oriental side." What should have been conceived was something like an "Oriental astrology" in the sense of the "Oriental philosophy." Certainly, Avicenna would have had the energy to conceive the program of it. It would have been wholly different from the astrology of "his time"; we can do no more than suggest it here.<sup>50</sup> But under the circumstances, since in this episode

49. In his article "Vues d'Avicenne sur l'astrologie et sur le rapport de la responsabilité humaine avec le destin."

character of the *Kerubim* and the *Animae coelestes* with the baneful or ambiguous traits of certain planetary divinities; cf. p. 336, n. 1.

50. There is difficulty in reconciling the



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

we are still in the *Occident* of the cosmos, it is neither surprising nor inappropriate that Hayy ibn Yaqzan initiates "Absal" into what is still precisely an "Occidental" astrology.

(5) *Toward the Orient* (ch. 17). This is a transitional episode that mentally carries us out of the Occident. It presents no difficulties. Particularly noticeable is the intensity of the visionary Image through which the Elements in their pure state are perceived.

(6) *The Orient* (chs. 18-23). We are first on the threshold of the Orient, in the kingdom of the soul (the "rising sun"), and the threshold is crowded with troops of demons. We have already indicated their meaning (above, second episode). Then, as the travelers ascend toward the Orient, they come successively to the geniuses of the soul, the terrestrial angels, the celestial Angels, the Archangels-Cherubs, the King withdrawn into His extreme solitude, with His beauty veiled by His own beauty in all beauties. . . . This time we are in the *place* of the "Oriental philosophy." Since all the preceding developments in the present book have been *oriented* toward the figures of this Orient, nothing need be added to them here for the moment. They will find their necessary complement in the translation of the Persian commentary, with our notes and glosses, which forms the last part of the present work.

(7) *Epilogue* (chs. 24-25). It is sketched with a firm hand, in two paragraphs of a few lines each. The first is that in which Suhrawardi's *Recital of Occidental Exile* found its point of departure (cf. above, § 4, pp. 41-42). The second is the decisive invitation, which Hayy ibn Yaqzan addresses to "Absal." The whole recital, indeed, has been only an *orientation*, a mental exploration, an initiation into the quest for the Orient. The question is now posed: the pilgrim is asked actually to set out on the Quest.

The two other recitals of the trilogy will give the answer to this invitation.

## IV *THE RECITAL OF THE BIRD*

### 14. *The Celestial Ascent (Mi'raj-Namah)*

"You see, my son, through how many bodily things in succession we have to make our way, and through how many troops of daemons and courses of stars, that we may press on to the one and only God"—so Hermes expresses himself, addressing his disciple Tat1 to invite him to an upward journey whose goal corresponds with that which Hayy ibn Yaqzan proposes to his adept. In referring to the Hermetic corpus we are by no means seeking to define the "historical" origins of the motif of the celestial *ascent*, either in general or in the spiritual world of Islam; we are in the presence of an archetype whose many exemplifications, in every sphere of the history of religion, are produced and reproduced by virtue of a deeper necessity than that for which historical causality is called upon to account. The necessity of an archetype means something entirely different from the propagation of a "commonplace." In speculative mysticism in Islam this exemplification will be likely to take the form of a *ta'wil* of the celestial ascent (*mi'raj*) of the Prophet; this ascent will itself presuppose the cosmological schema whose essential data were sketched in the foregoing chapters. It is such a book of celestial ascent in Persian (*Mi'raj-Namah*) that is attributed by the majority of the manuscripts to Avicenna but by some to Suhrawardi, in whose work Hermes personifies precisely the hero of the mystical upward journey from sphere to sphere of the "celestial Occident." Thus the admonition cited above from the Hermetic corpus figures here

1. *Corpus hermeticum*, IV, 8; ed. Nock, of the Naassenes; compare Scott, *Hermetica*,  
tr. Festugiere, I, 52; cf. *ibid.*, I, 56, Man- II, 148-49. (The English translation given  
daean parallels and the "psalm of the soul" above is Scott's, I, 155.)

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

spontaneously in its place, as one of the many testimonies to the same vision.<sup>2</sup>

We may take it as unlikely that the *Mi'raj-Namah* about to be briefly analyzed is the work of Suhrawardi; nor is it any more probable that it is the work of Avicenna,<sup>3</sup> although we have in it a book whose composition is contemporary with him. Hence its spiritual teaching is of considerable interest. Like all treatises developing the same theme, it presents the typical chart of the soul's celestial itinerary in its upward journey toward its country of origin. It is the same "track" that the itinerary of the Avicennan *Recital of the Bird* will follow; and it is for this reason that this particular *Miraj-Namah* requires mention here, whether or not it is the work of Avicenna. For the *Recital of the Bird*, as mental effectuation of the journey into the Orient to which the closing words of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* invites, is *eo ipso* connected with all the literature that has developed around the *Mi'raj*.

The real meaning of the connection must be indicated at once. If Avicenna wrote his own *Mi'raj-Namah*, it will be precisely his *Recital of the Bird*; just as Suhrawardi's *Mi'rdj-Ndmah* is his *Recital of Occidental Exile*. By this we mean that both recitals testify to the fact that their narrators, each in the measure of his own spiritual experience, reproduced the case of the Prophet, relieved for and by themselves the exemplary spiritual condition typified in the *Mi'raj*. By experiencing this in their turn, they have performed the *ta'wil*, the *exegesis* of their soul. Whereas to write a commentary in the margin of the personal *Mi'raj* of the Prophet, even a *ta'wil* of his *Mi'raj*, is still to advance no further than the situation of a commentator; however intelligent he may be, the pyre commentator will not write a *Recital of the Bird* in the first person (cf. above, p. 33). Now, it is in this situation that the penetrating commentator on the *Mi'raj-Namah* summarized below would remain if he did not from the first foreshadow the passage to the *hikayat*, to the personal "recital."

2. Testimonies that obviously cannot be listed here; for a general exposition, see especially Bousset, "Die Himmelsreise der Seele"; compare Mircea Eliade, *Patterns*, §§ 32-34, on myths of ascent and the symbolism of ascent.

3. Since Mr. Gh. H. Sadiqi has prepared the edition of this text for the Collection du Millenaire, it is not for us to anticipate here the arguments that he intends to set forth in his preface. We may note that

the traditional attribution to Avicenna is still attested in the late *Dabestan al-Madhab*, which reproduces the text. Shahrasturi attributes a *Mi'raj-Namah* to Suhrawardi; did he have our treatise in mind? The Persian *Majmu'a* 992 in the Ferdowsi National Library (Teheran), dated A.H. 659, which reproduces the treatise (omitting the long prologue to which we refer in the text), attributes it to Suhrawardi by name (foll. 22 ff.).

### The Celestial Ascent (*Mi'raj-Namah*)

Without this horizon, the situation would be precisely that of the commentators on Avicenna's and Suhrawardi's recitals. Their ingenious *ta'wil* is only an exegesis of the texts, without *exegesis* of the soul. It leads backward, hitherward, to the theoretical data that preceded the vision; this they explain, showing quite capably "what it means," but without *seeing* or making seeable what it *sees*. Thereby the vision itself vanishes; its plastic aspect, corresponding to the soul's most secret anticipations, is destroyed; the symbol becomes superfluous and at the same time is degraded into allegory. Now, the experiential interest of the Avicennan recitals consists in the fact that, suddenly, the tissue of conceptual patencies and speculative discourse was broken, and there was the face-to-face with a person, even if the encounter took place only in the anticipation and the ardent desire that summons it but that also *eo ipso* is *already* experiencing it. In order that the author of a recital of "celestial ascent" may declare in closing: "It is I who am in this recital"<sup>4</sup>—or else, like Avicenna at the end of the *Recital of the Bird*, may wrap himself in humor out of modesty—the case of the Prophet in his *Mi'raj* must have presented itself not as a simple historical case, whatever its historicity, but as an exemplary case that the mystic was called upon to reproduce. This presupposes an increasing approximation to this archetypal value.

On this point we are indebted to the great Spanish Arabist Asin Palacios for researches whose fruits have not yet all been gathered. His demonstrations in regard to Muslim eschatology in *The Divine Comedy* had aroused memorable reactions among Romanists.<sup>5</sup> The similarities assembled were undeniable, but they did not yet constitute positive proof of the "historical fact." The question remained: how could Dante have had direct knowledge of the Muslim eschatological representations, especially as presented in the literature of the *Mi'raj*? It was thirty years before renewed researches proved the existence and the dissemination of Castilian, Latin, French, and Italian translations from as early as the thirteenth century, with the result that the fact appeared not only possible but highly probable. After the monumental work in which the eminent Italian historian Enrico Cerulli brought together such a large number of translations and texts, it remains proven that the Western world was well acquainted at the period with a certain number of eschatological representations current in

4. Suhrawardi does this at the end of his *Recital of Occidental Exile*, §44 of our edition (*Opera metaphysica*, II, 296).

5. Cf. Miguel Asin Palacios, *La Eschatologia musulmana en la Divina Comedia*.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

Islam,<sup>6</sup> and the possibility that Dante himself had knowledge of them can no longer be denied. However, we are not here called upon to enter the maze of controversies that are all the more easily revived because their presuppositions are generally unavowed. There is simply the fact that these comparative researches have brought to light a whole literature on the subject of the *Mi'raj*, the recital of the celestial ascent, the connections between which and our Avicennan or Suhrawardian visionary recitals we have just indicated.

As Asm pointed out,<sup>7</sup> the supposedly historical case of the ascent of the Prophet is very early referred, transposed to other beings, real or symbolic, physical or spiritual, who are held to perform their journey to the regions of bliss by following the same stages as Muhammad in his *Mi'raj*. Two types of representations emerge. One concerns the post-mortem ascent of the soul under conduct of the Angel, or the ascent of certain personified metaphysical entities (for example, the works of the faithful, borne every day from heaven to heaven by guardian Angels). A second type makes the Sufi in person the protagonist in Muhammad's place;<sup>8</sup> his mystical ascent at once presupposes and declares that the saint can acquire the prophetic dignity. Thus the great Iranian mystic Abu Yazid Bastami (d. 261/875) made use of a real ascent in spirit to the divine throne, through the stages passed through by Muhammad in his *Mi'raj*. The Sufi or the '*drif*' (the adept, the gnostic) becomes the type of the spiritual hero who in his ecstasies rises to the summits of contemplative life and of the bliss of vision. So, in the Avicennan recital, it will befall the soul that, under the form of the Bird, mounts from heaven to heaven to the sanctuary of the King whose beauty has no equal.

The Sufi thus receives the privilege of reproducing and imitating the case of the Prophet, of being his genuine follower; the *ta'wil* of the *Mi'raj* is then performed not in the margin of the text but as an exegesis of the soul. It is a com-

6. Cf. Enrico Cerulli, Il "*Libro della scala*" e la questione delle fonti arabo-spagnole della *Divina Commedia*; cf. an analysis of this book, enriched by personal developments and bibliographical indications, by Maxime Rodinson, "Dante et l'Islam d'après des travaux récents"; we referred earlier to the interesting treatise by a twelfth-century Latin Avicennan discovered by M. T. d'Alverny (above, p. 112).

7. Cf. Asin Palacios, pp. 73-89, but with every reservation in regard to the term

"allegorical adaptations," the reasons for whose inadequacy was precisely what we had undertaken to show here.

8. A substitution that attains its full development in Sa'inaddin Ispahani's epistle on "the splitting of the moon" (*shaqq al-qamar*), in which every Spiritual who attains to union with the Intelligence Holy Spirit, "Angel of Humanity," in his turn becomes the "seal of the prophetic mission"; cf. our "Prolegomenes II," pp. 53-54; cf. also above, p. 23.

### The Celestial Ascent (*Mi'raj-Namah*)

parable valorization that, in Shi'ism, will lead Haydar Amuli expressly to maintain the thesis that the true Shi'ite is the Sufi. To obtain an idea of the wide variations suggested by the theme of the *Mi'raj*, we may compare two almost contemporary examples. One is the development furnished by Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240) in his *Futuhat* (ch. 167), in which two persons perform the celestial ascent together; they are not exactly a philosopher and a theologian, but a speculative given up to his personal improvisations, an independent (*sahibu'n-nazari'l-mustaqilli*), and a disciple, an adept (*tabi'*) whom a master has initiated into the Tradition. The great theosophist describes their pilgrimage with no little humor; at each heaven, the adept is recognized and greeted by the prophet or prophets who reside there, while the independent philosopher has to content himself with conversing not with the Intelligence or the Soul (we are not quite in the Avicennan schema) but with the spiritual entity (*ruhaniya*) presiding over the heaven. To be sure, he learns a great many things, but he is mortified at not being admitted to the same conversations as his companion. In the Heaven of Saturn, the situation becomes yet worse. The philosopher may go no higher, and has to await the return of his companion, who is allowed to proceed to the mysteries of the Ninth Heaven.<sup>9</sup> The second example is found in the celebrated Persian mystical epic by 'Attar (d. 1229), *Mantiq al-Tayr* (The Language of the Birds), the relation of which to Avicenna's recital will be discussed later. With 'Attar's poem, the end of the celestial ascent finally marks full mystical consciousness of encountering, attaining to, the Self to which one says "Thou."

We have just said that the general fault of the commentaries on these symbolical visions lies in replacing their symbols by a system of rational representations, in referring, and therefore reducing, the ineffable reality that can be *spoken* and *seen* only in symbols to the plane of logical patencies. The commentary on the *Mi'raj-Namah* attributed to Avicenna would not be free from this defect if we considered it independently of the road that it prepares. But, whether Avicennan or not, this amplification belongs among the Persian renderings of the *Mi'raj*, which have yet been little studied in comparison with the Arabic renderings. Furthermore, as it anticipates and outlines the itinerary that will be followed by the Bird and its companions in the Avicennan recital, the latter will present itself to us as a typical case of *ofta'wil* of the *Mi'raj*, in which the mystical hero takes the Prophet's place and is invested with the

9. Cf. *al-Futufrat al-Makkiya*, II, 273 ff.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

right to speak in the first person. In its brevity, the Avicennan *Recital of the Bird* bears a very personal imprint; its denouement, in short, simply assumes, precisely in the "first person," the conclusion of this *Mi'raj-Namah* also attributed to Avicenna.

Nominally, of course, the text of the *Mi'raj* retains the person of the Prophet as protagonist; actually, the intention is conscious from the beginning; the dialogues are those presupposed by the quest for perfect gnosis. Because a person is interposed, there is material for a *ta'wil of the text*. But, because the Prophet is present only as archetype of the Sufi, the recital need only be transposed into the first person to become a *ta'wil of the soul*. This is what the *Recital of the Bird* will do. Its fundamental intention is, then, to legitimize this *ta'wil*, which it already assumes. This is why it will insist on the fact that in the divine teaching directly received by the Prophet—who was allowed not only to contemplate but to circle about the divine presence—the duality of *zahir* and *batin*, of letter and spiritual sense, of exoteric and esoteric, is established and motivated. The text itself of the recital, which subtends this intention, differs profoundly from certain traditional versions. All the color of a folklore that is sometimes in dubious taste is absent, because without interest and out of place here. The sole aim is a lofty spiritual edification.

The manuscripts differ;<sup>10</sup> some of them contain a long prologue devoted to the detailed exposition of a doctrine intended quite as much to confirm the conclusion of the *Mi'raj* as to be confirmed by it. There is no occasion to discuss this prologue here. We may note, however, that it relies on the "angelic pedagogy" (*tarbiyat*), the idea of which we have earlier developed as essential to these celestial itineraries of mental ascent (above, § 8). The bulk of mankind never advance beyond the first step of this pedagogy, that which they receive from the Active Intelligence according to the very various measure of their respective capacities. Others, however, make themselves fit to receive the successive assistance of all the celestials, and finally unite with the First Intelligence, which is the Universal Intelligence. The relation of each celestial Soul to its Intelligence—a relation that defines the individuated relation of our souls

10. Since Mr. Sadiqi's edition (based on several manuscripts), now in the press, was unavailable, I cite the *Mi'raj-Namah* here from a modern (A.H. 1294) but very good copy contained in MS. No. 29 (pp. 1-27) of the Department of Iranology of the Institut Franco-Iranien (Teheran). This

copy contains the long prologue referred to above. We may mention that Mr. Mahdi Bayani has published, in the Collection du Millenaire, a facsimile of a copy of the *Mir'aj-Namah* written by the hand of Fakhraddin Razi.

## The Celestial Ascent (*Mi'raj-Namah*)

to the Active Intelligence—likewise defines the particular relation of each of these privileged souls to the First Intelligence. Such is the case of the Prophets. But high above all the angelic hierarchies of Intelligences is the first of the Angels, the Holy Spirit (*Ruh al-Quds*). A long exposition follows, in which the distinction between inner word and uttered word tends to make the process of Revelation itself the basis for the simultaneous legitimacy of the *zahir* and its *ta'wil*.

As for the actual text of the recital, which alone directly concerns us here, it begins with a preamble in which the Prophet himself is the speaker:<sup>11</sup> "One night I lay asleep in my house. It was a night in which there were thunder and lightning. No living beings could be heard, no bird journeyed. No one was *awake*, whereas I was not asleep; I dwelt between waking and sleep." This is the characteristic initial state recorded by all visionary recitals;<sup>12</sup> what ordinary consciousness regards as day and the waking state is, for the mystic, only a night and a sleep from which he has at last awakened. "Suddenly Gabriel the Archangel descended in his own form, of such beauty, of such sacred glory,<sup>13</sup> of such majesty, that all my dwelling was illuminated." The commentator interprets the event as signifying a union of the Holy Spirit with the Prophet's soul, all of whose faculties it seizes and invests. But here we run into difficulties. That Gabriel is the Holy Spirit—this fundamental identity we have already pointed out, as well as his identification with the Active Intelligence of the philosophers. But at the end of his celestial ascent, the mystic will encounter a supreme Angel, the greatest of the Angels, of whom it will be said (as already in the prologue) that he is the Holy Spirit and that his name is Michael. A perfect schematization will require some speculative subtlety.<sup>14</sup>

11. MS. cited, p. 14, l. 6.

12. Compare in Suhrawardi: **the** prologue to *Gabriel's Wing* (the visionary taking up a torch when night has shed its darkness on the lower world); in the *Recital of Occidental Exile*, the spiritual ascent of the soul takes place at night (lightning flashing over the forbidden regions of the "Najd"); it is this same "night" that shelters the mystic in his escape from common norms; cf. also the lightning flash in the Avicennan version of *Salaman and Absal*, below, ch. v.

13. Note **the** words *Baha o Farr*, as-

sociating the idea of beauty and the idea of "glory" (*farr*, the Mazdean *xvarnah*) as proper to beings of light; sometimes too, *farr*, *khurrah*, is translated simply by *baha*, "beauty"; cf. our "Prolegomenes II," p. 56, n. 121a.

14. But this fluctuation, this reciprocal transparency, between figures is perhaps essential to the signification of angelology (cf. the example of the Angel Gabriel and the Perfect Nature, above, p. 22, n. 24, and p. 88, n. 95; the angelology of Hermas, above, pp. 22–23); then too, all the Intelligences of the pleroma are "Active Intelli-



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

However this may be, the text gives a dazzling description of Gabriel the Archangel: he is of a whiteness brighter than snow, his face is gloriously beautiful, the waves of his hair fall in long folds; his brow is encircled as with a diadem of light on which is written *La ilaha illallah . . . (Non Deus nisi Deus)*; his person is set off by six hundred wings variegated by seventy thousand grains of red chrysolite. We are to understand this, says the commentary, as follows: if the beauty and splendor discovered by mental vision in the state of isolation (*tajarrud*) of the intelligence should leave traces visible to the senses, the sensible object would have the beauty described in the person of the Angel. "When he had approached me, he took me in his arms, kissed me between the eyes, and said: O sleeper, how long wilt thou sleep? Arise! Tenderly will I guide thee. Fear not, for I am Gabriel, thy brother." *To sleep* is to remain satisfied with the false and ready-made opinions that everyone repeats. To wake (to be a "Yaqzan," an *Egregoros*) is to become conscious of all the universes to which one can gain access only in the state of mystical waking (*bidari*). The fear first felt at this prospect, then soothed by the tender solicitude of the celestial Guide, the signs of "recognition" that he gives, correspond to the ethos of all these recitals of mystical overwhelming. "Yet I said: Brother, what if there be an enemy lying in wait?—I will not deliver thee into the enemy's hand. Rise. Be prudent. Possess thy heart.—Then was I overwhelmed; I arose and began to walk in the footsteps of Gabriel the Archangel."

Now begins the *second* episode of the nocturnal journey that takes the Prophet from Mecca to Jerusalem. He first encounters the strange creature Buraq, which is to serve him as mount and which is found in all the miniatures depicting the Prophet's celestial ascent. Here there is a fresh difficulty for the unfortunate interpreter who is too studious of coherence. Our commentator identifies this mystical "mount" with the Active Intelligence; at first, however, it is "restive"; Gabriel has to quiet it—which, for our commentator, means that the soul cannot offer itself to the illumination effused by the Active Intelligence unless a sacrosanct power (*quwwat-e qudsi*) has purified it from the distractions of ignorance and unconsciousness. However, what we know of the Avicennan doctrine elsewhere has scarcely prepared us for this symbolism—that is, for regarding the Active Intelligence as a mystical "mount" and subordinating its "use" to another celestial intervention. Instead, we should find everything

gences" and "Holy Spirits" (above, p. 77, the Mazdean angel traditionally identified n. 78), and, similarly, the *Dabestan* gives with Gabriel).  
each of them the name *Sraosha* (the name of

### The Celestial Ascent (*Mi'raj-Namah*)

more consistent if, as we have learned from the commentator on *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* and all our philosophers, the Angel Gabriel, since he is the Holy Spirit, were here in person precisely the Active Intelligence, the Guide who offers his services at the end of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, and if the soul's mystical "mount" were its *intellectus contemplativus* (typifying the "terrestrial angel" whose place is on the right and who is precisely one of those who "ascend toward heaven"). In this case the allusion to the resistance of the "mount," which can only be quieted by the Angel's illumination, becomes perfectly clear.

Other difficulties will arise. On two occasions a voice addresses the travelers. It summons the Prophet to halt; each time the Angel warns him: "Go on, halt not." We learn that these voices were the final appeal of the faculties of natural consciousness, terrified by the adventure undertaken with divine assistance. The first is the voice of the *vis cogitativa*, the second that of the *vis imaginativa*. We understand very well why they must be disregarded, and what danger lay in them; but then we shall be surprised to find them again among the "terrestrial angels," in the same Temple where the Prophet will have his first encounter with the assembly of Angels and Prophets.

For the moment, having left them behind, and having crossed the mountains that surround Mecca, the travelers reach Jerusalem. Someone comes to meet the Prophet, and offers him three cups—one of wine, another of honey, another of milk. The Prophet inclines to take the cup of wine; the Angel prevents him and signs to him to take the cup of milk. For the three cups respectively represent the three spirits or *pneumas*—the vital or animal pneuma, the physical pneuma, and the thinking pneuma. Now, the pilgrim must at any cost gain independence from the first two. Preponderance of the animal pneuma signifies preponderance of the two redoubtable companions described in the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, the irascible and concupiscible powers that make man a demonic being. Conversely, to subjugate and "sublimate"<sup>15</sup> them is to allow the realization, however exceptional it may be, of the human being in the true sense, in whom the nature of the Angel predominates.<sup>16</sup> Thereupon the purified soul can enter the Temple (*masjid aqsa*), while the muezzin chants the Call to Prayer. There the soul sees the assembly of Angels and Prophets; it receives the salute of welcome from each of them in turn. The commentator would have us see in this upward journey and this entrance into the Temple a mental

15. The first must be changed into inner heroism, the second into chaste love; cf. p. 306, n. 2.

16. "Ya'ni malakiash ghalib shawad w-az devi dortar uftad": MS. cited, p. 18, l. 12 (cf. above, p. 83).

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

ascent of the microcosm; the image then projected by mental realization corresponds to a technique of meditation practiced in other schools of mysticism.<sup>17</sup> We know too how the "terrestrial angels" proceed from the microcosm in imitation of those of the macrocosm. The assembly of Angels in the Temple typifies the assembly of the inner psychic faculties that have their seat in the brain<sup>18</sup> and that, each respectively, correspond to one of the sensible faculties whose abandonment has marked the *awakening* and conditioned the Departure. But this assembly too must be left in its turn.

Now begins the *third* great episode, which, taking place outside of the limits of the microcosm, will lead us from heaven to heaven and even beyond the Ninth Heaven, to the threshold of the Holy Spirit, as the birds of the *Recital of the Bird* will likewise be led there. "I turned my face and looked upward; I found a ladder with alternate rungs of silver and gold." Then, at each heaven, the same episode is repeated: dazzling description of the Angel who presides over the heaven and of the Angels by whom he is surrounded; each sits on a throne (as in the *Ascension of Isaiah*); each time they welcome the pilgrim. Thus, in the First Heaven, there is the Angel Ismael;<sup>19</sup> in the Second Heaven, an Angel of perfect beauty, whose nature unites snow and fire without mingling them;<sup>20</sup> in the Third (Venus), an Angel surpassing all others in grace and beauty, etc. The Fifth Heaven alone (Mars) creates a dissonance; it is a realm of darkness and terror, Hell. Thus, the visionary rises from sphere to sphere of the "cosmic crypt" that, in the terms of *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, constitutes the celestial Occident. We should note that the angelology illustrated by this ascent corresponds less to the representation of the *Kerubim* and of their Souls, Angels

17. A similar technique is found in two of Suhrawardi's recitals: *Mu'nis al-Ushshaq* (The Familiar of the Mystical Lovers) and *Risalat al-Abraj* (Epistle of the Towers), translations of which we have in preparation. On the homologation of the mystical physiological centers (*cakras*) with the cosmic regions, compare Mircea Eliade, *Techniques du Toga*, pp. 191 ff.; Erwin Rousselle, "Spiritual Guidance in Contemporary Taoism," pp. 65 ff.

18. Their descriptions and their relations correspond to what is suggested by the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, ch. 7, with the commentator's explanation.

19. On the traditions of the encounter

with this Angel at the time of the *Isra*, and of the seventy thousand angels who are subordinate to him, each of them with seventy thousand angels below him in turn, cf. 'Abbas Qummi, *Safinat Bihar al-Anwar*, I, 659.

20. This twofold aspect in the nature of the Angel of the Heaven of Mercury symbolizes the twofold nature traditionally attributed to Hermes-Mercury; cf. C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, index, s.v. Mercurius, as hermaphrodite; id., "Der Geist Mercurius," pp. 90 ff., 103 ff.; J. Evola, *La Tradizione Ermetica*, pp. 55 ff.; on the polarity of fire and snow, cf. Odeberg, ed., 3 *Enoch*, pt. II, pp. 130-31.

## The Celestial Ascent (*Mi'raj-Namah*)

Intelligences, and celestial Angels (above, §§ 6 and 7) than to the astrological thematization found in ch. 16 of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. However, except in the Fifth Heaven, the Angel is a power of light, not a malevolent archon (it is true that our commentator completely destroys the vision when he apparently wishes to reduce it to that of the sensible luminous mass of the star). The parallelism with the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* is confirmed by the description of the Eighth Heaven, the Heaven of the Fixed Stars, inhabited by the spiritual Angels, absorbed in their glorifying joy, each having an oratory that none seeks to take from him. "Not one of us but has a recognized station" (Koran xxxva: 164).<sup>21</sup>

The Ninth Heaven (cf. above, § 9) is the "Lotus of the boundary" (LIII : 14). After traversing it, the visionary, having thus emerged from cosmic space, first sees four seas, each of a different color. These seas, says the commentator, are the ideal realities (*haqiqat*) of substantiality, corporeality, Matter, and Form. Then appear a multitude of souls, which are those to which it has been given to attain the state of Angelhood; they are divided into angelic choirs or societies whose names derive from verses of the Koran: the Adoring, the Pure, the Near Angels, the Glorifying,<sup>22</sup> etc. Leaving these assemblies, the Prophet comes to a boundless sea;<sup>23</sup> he sees an Angel pouring the Water of the sea into a great river, which carries the Water everywhere. We have no difficulty in here reading, with the commentator, a symbol of the First Intelligence, eternal creation of the First Being, and first mediator of the divine effusion of being of which, after the First Intelligence, the First Soul is the first receptacle, the two together forming the celestial archetype of an eternal Adam-Eve.<sup>24</sup>

We now come to the last episode of the *Mi'raj-Namah*. Beyond this vast sea that symbolizes with the First Intelligence, the visionary sees a yet vaster valley: "Over against the valley, I saw an Angel in meditation, perfect in Majesty, Glory,<sup>25</sup> and Beauty. When he saw me, he called me to him. When I had come close to him, I asked: 'What is thy name?'—He said: '*Michael*. I am the greatest of the Angels; whatever difficulty thou conceivest, question me;

21. Compare *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, ch. 15, pp. 333-34 of our translation. *muqarrabuna* (cf. IV:170), *al-mutahharuna* (cf. LVI:78).

22. These angelic "societies" are mentioned in the *Risala fil-Mala'ika* (above, p. 62). There are: *ar-raki'una s-sajiduna* (cf. Koran ix:115), *wa-inna lanahnu'l-musab-bihuna* (cf. XXXVH:166), *al-mala'ikatu'l-*

23. Cf. *Ifayy ibn Yaqzan*, ch. 16, § 9.

24. This typification is also known in Ismailianism; cf., e.g., Nasir-e Khusraw, *Six Chapters*, ch. 4.

25. Still the same association *Baha o Farr*; cf. above, p. 171, n. 13.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

whatever thou desirest, ask of : (The commentator reminds us that this Angel, the greatest of the Angels, is the Holy Spirit; here, consequently, the Holy Spirit is no longer identified with Gabriel, but with the Archangel Michael. We pointed out this problem in angelology earlier.) "I said to him: 'To come hither, I have undergone many toils and sufferings. But my purpose was this: to attain to gnosis and the vision of the Veritable. Show me the direction that leads to Him, so that perhaps I may attain the goal of my desire, and may receive a portion of His universal grace, and may then return to my house.' "

This supplication shows to what a point, in the text of our Persian *Mi'raj*, the Prophet speaks and acts as an interposed personage, or as representative of the Sufi gnostic. The very composition of the recital is conceived in view of this denouement, in the margin of which mystical philosophy will have but to perform a *ta'wil* that is authorized and justified from the beginning. The Prophet, and in his person the Sufi, asks that the eye of the heart be opened in him; he is the representative, the archetype, of those whom Hayy ibn Yaqzan mentions (ch. 16), "those who emigrate toward the kingdom." "Then that Angel took me by the hand; he made me enter and led me through so many veils of light that the universe that I saw had nothing in common with everything that I had previously seen in these worlds." But, like Moses, the mystical pilgrim had asked for the vision (*ru'ya*). It is not, however, to the impossible Vision that the Archangel Michael Holy Spirit guides him. He experiences the divine presence as a traversal of infinite veils of light; only a *Voice* summons him: "Come yet nearer." He does not see, does not apprehend, for that which transcends all categories cannot be apprehended. The presence is Quietude, all-sufficiency unto itself. The intelligence vacillates, experiences something like intoxication; then fear seizes on the soul immersed in the *tremenda Majestas*. Perhaps it has gone too far, perhaps it has advanced too deeply into the Unitude? The Voice calms it: "Fear not, be quieted, come nearer yet"—that is, cast off this bond too, free thyself from fear and hope, for fear and hope are still failings pertaining to the states of the sensible creation.

The Voice itself does not vibrate like a discourse composed of words, letters, and sounds. It is the ideal reality of the Word that is the establishment and erection of pure *gnosis* in the mind. Again it commands: " 'Ask.'—I said: 'Permit me to ask concerning all that has been shown to me, so that all doubts may end.' " This is to ask for supreme Knowledge, for *gnosis*, which marks the final stage of this *mental* journey. With these last words, the commentator expressly points out that the *Mi'raj* is not of the physical or corporeal order;

### The Celestial Ascent (*Mi'raj-Namah*)

he thus takes a stand against a considerable sector of theological opinion in Islam.<sup>26</sup> For, he says, a *Mi'raj* understood in the physical sense would have nothing to do with the quest for supreme gnosis that is the goal (*maqsud*) here. No, it is a psychic event, an assumption of the soul by its faculty of mental projection (*quwwat-e fikri*). For supreme gnosis, the end of all the preceding angelic "pedagogies," is the mystery of the inner Word that then permits the Prophet to declare the Revelation communicated to him, to set it forth in an outward (*zahir*, exoteric) discourse such that it can contain the hidden (*batin*, esoteric) spiritual meaning, yet without the veil being lifted. And it is by the aid of this same gnosis that it is also possible to represent, and to represent *to oneself*, as a journey in outward space (*safar-e zahir*, exoteric) what was in essence a *mental journey* (*safar-e fikri*).

We have been obliged to give only an extremely brief summary of this beautiful and substantial text, which will require further consideration at some future day. The conclusion reveals what we stated at the beginning to be the essential purpose of the recital and its commentary, admirably adapted to one another as if in virtue of a pre-established harmony: the legitimacy of the *ta'wil* that the supreme experience of prophetic gnosis authorizes by originating the polarity *zahir-batin*, exoteric and esoteric. It is notable that it is not only the statement of divine Revelations, but also all symbolic visions (such as this mental journey), that thus appear in their original "motivation." As the motivation of these visions, Avicennan doctrine would rather have led us to expect the intervention of the celestial Souls (*Angeli coelorum*), invested with the power of a holy imagination independent of the sensible.

In any case, our *Mi'raj* teaches us one thing: at the source of symbols, at the origin of the high psychic tension that brings about the transmutation of the sensible into symbols, there is the "Major Overwhelming" of the soul that finds expression in the form of a celestial ascent. If now the interposed personage of the Prophet is eliminated and replaced by him whom in fact it represents, we shall once again have the recital in the first person. It will be the *Recital of the*

2.6. Note that the same problem arose for medieval Zoroastrianism, in connection with the ecstasies that bore Zarathustra into the presence of Ohrmazd and the Archangels: ascent with the material body or by the "spiritual body"? From the same angelophany (appearance of the Archangel Bahman in human form), literalists and esoter-

ists deduce opposite conclusions. The former conclude the physical materiality of the event; the latter infer that if the Archangel can appear in human form, it is precisely because human nature in the true sense is essentially spiritual; cf. F. Rosenberg, ed. and tr., *Zaratusht-Nama*, p. 28.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

*Bird* as continuing the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, for the Bird gives the positive answer to the Angel's invitation by setting out "into the Orient" as companion to Hayy ibn Yaqzan, individuation of the Active Intelligence—on the same road as that taken by the Prophet on his *Mi'raj* in company with Gabriel, who is also the Holy Spirit and the Active Intelligence. We can recognize the same stages in it; some dramaturgic details are as it were implied by the fact that it is, of course, a *Mi'raj* not *in corpore* but *in spirit*. Rendered capable of performing a mental ascent through a world of symbols secreted and perceived by itself, the soul begins by producing its own symbol. It apprehends itself under a figure that permits it to perform its own *ta'wil*, and this symbol will remain incomprehensible to any but itself, as will be shown in the delightfully humorous passage with which the Avicennan recital ends. This symbol of the Bird, which figures the soul to itself, through which it recalls itself and anticipates itself, returns as an archetype in many comparable experiences.

### 15. *The Bird as Symbol*

Our intention here is not to seek out the "historical sources" of the Avicennan *Recital of the Bird*. Its first source and its final "explanation" are Avicenna himself and his own inner experience. Rather, this experience can become perspicuous to us by suggesting that we group around it a constellation of symbols of the same type. Like the symbol of the celestial ascent, the symbol of the Bird recurs so often in the succession of mystical experiences that we must here confine ourselves to a few essential cases. Plato, of course, offers us one of the most fully developed exemplifications of it. By showing us the soul occupied in governing its two redoubtable companions and balancing them one against the other, the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* has already reminded us of the myth in the *Phaedrus*: the chariot of the soul drawn by its yoked but unlike horses.<sup>27</sup> However, the myth in the *Phaedrus* imagines the soul in the likeness of an Energy whose nature is that of a pair of winged steeds driven from a chariot by a charioteer who is also winged (*Phaedrus*, 246a). The Avicennan symbolism of the Bird concentrates on the charioteer. It is impossible to improve upon Plato's own formulation of the reasons for this ever-recurrent vision in which the soul perceives itself as a winged being, because the *wing* is the most divine among corporeal things: "The wing is intended to soar aloft and carry that which gravitates downward into the upper region, which is the dwelling of the

27. Cf. p. 306, n. 2.

## The Bird as Symbol

gods; and this is that element of the body which is most akin to the divine." 28

Every reader of Plato recollects the magnificent image of the celestial procession of souls and of the fall of some among them. It is the divine—that is, what is beautiful, wise, and good—that strengthens and develops the soul's wings. "When perfect and fully winged, [the soul] soars upward, and is the ruler of the universe." This is the case with the souls of the gods, or of those privileged beings who resemble them, those whom their aspiration carries to the threshold of another world, outside of the physical cosmos. Other souls are unable to sustain the effort of contemplation. Attempting to rise, they collide with one another, tread on one another; their wings fail and break. "When the soul has lost its wings, it is borne downward until it has laid hold on something solid." Its fall does not end until it is stopped by the solidly assembled mass that is a body in which the element earth predominates (cf. *Phaedrus*, 246c).

It is not, of course, the mere presence of the soul in a body that, according to the Platonic myth, implies its fall. For the divine souls, which are exempt from falling, have a body too; but theirs is a body of fire, not a body in which the element earth predominates.<sup>29</sup> To the soul, the loss of its wings signifies its capture and imprisonment in an earthly body. Elsewhere the Platonic myth associates the celestial procession of souls (in the course of which they contemplate the supracellular place, the Plain of Truth), or their fall, with the idea of the circular revolution that will eventually bring the firmament back to the same point. Here the myth would have to be modified by other representations of the descent or fall of the soul, to obtain a precise correspondence with the discreet allusion in the *Recital of the Bird*. The latter refers rather to a seduction or, more properly, to a ruse, a deceit, which tears the soul away from the eternal past of its pre-existence. This pre-existence, as we said, is assumed by the Suhrawardian and Avicennan recitals. It is in no sense an "allegory"; but how should the soul become conscious of *its* own pre-existence to its terrestrial condition, except in symbols? And how should it speak of it without the discretion of symbols? As soon as this presentiment arises in it, the same constellation of symbols forms again and makes the soul's present condition transparent

28. *Phaedrus*, 246d (tr. Benjamin Jowett); cf. also F. Cumont, *Le Symbolisme funéraire chez les romains*, pp. 109 ff.

29. This is why, according to the Ismailian theosophy, Iblis refuses to adore Adam, because he is conscious that his own

nature is of Fire, while Adam's had its origin in the element Earth (cf. Nasiraddin Tusi, *Tasawwurat*, ed. Ivanow, p. 47 of the Persian text). Compare also, in Hermeticism: the soul, delivered from its body of Earth, resumes its robe of Fire.



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

and decipherable to it: there are the Bird with broken wings, the beings of light, of beauty and gentleness, its true family, its preterrestrial family, toward which it is summoned by a devouring nostalgia; there are the messengers or the Guide, sent to rescue it, to awaken it, console it, help it to triumph over its enemies (cf. above, pp. 157-58, the "Hymn of the Soul" from the *Acts of Thomas*).

The affective tonality of the *Recital of the Bird* will sound its full gamut if, not confining ourselves to simple allusions here, we associate with the recital a few texts drawn from religious universes apparently separated by time and space. So, for example, we find that the symbols whose coherence has just been indicated insistently impose themselves in the Manichaean Psalter. We may take, for example, the long psalm after each verse of which comes the refrain of the choir who have sung it: "O soul, O soul, be mindful of thy Aeons. . . . O soul, whence art thou? Thou art from on high. Thou art a stranger to the world, a sojourner on the earth for (?) men. . . . Thou hast thy houses on high, thy tents of joy. Thou hast thy true Father, thy true Mother. Thou hast thy true brethren. . . . O soul, do not forget thyself, for they are all hunting for thee, even the hunters of death.<sup>30</sup> *They catch the birds . . . they break (?) their wings* that they may not fly to their dovecotes. O soul, lift up thy head and go to thy native land. . . . O soul, O soul, be mindful of thy Aeons."<sup>31</sup>

For, in return, the soul in its terrestrial solitude is neither forgotten nor abandoned by the beings of the World of Light who are its true family: "The Youth groaned and wept in the pit which is at the bottom of Hades. . . . Hast thou not heard, O Great Brighteners . . . that Hades has been stirred up and rebelled? . . . The false Gods that have rebelled have taken their armour against me<sup>32</sup> . . . the stinking and foul demons have prepared to make war with me. When the Mighty one heard . . . he called an Envoy, the Adamas of Light, the pitiless, the subduer of the rebels, [saying] 'Go down, go, O Adamas; . . . succour the Youth that is beneath the pit that is at the bottom of Hades; . . . strengthen and encourage the Youth.' "<sup>33</sup> The Avicennan Bird

30. Compare below (§17), at the beginning of the *Recital of the Bird*, the episode of the hunters; similarly, at the beginning of Suhrawardi's *Recital of Occidental Exile*: "They took us prisoners with chains and fetters of iron" (the same episode occurs in the *Epistle on the State of Infancy*).

31. C. R. C. Allberry, ed., *A Manichaean Psalm-book*, pt. II, pp. 181-82.

32. Here again compare with the *Recital of Occidental Exile*: the "city whose inhabitants are oppressors," the *pit* into which they threw the captive.

33. *Psalms of Thomas*, in *A Manichaean Psalm-book*, pt. II, pp. 209-10; cf. also the dialogue between Jesus-Ziva (Jesus Brightness) and the Child, (French) tr. E. Benveniste, "Hymnes manichéens."

## The Bird as Symbol

is likewise not alone: it journeys "in company with the King's Messenger."

It is for the psychology of symbols to discover under what conditions this appearance of the soul to itself takes place—of the soul perceiving itself in the **form** of a winged being. The symbolism of the wing imposes itself spontaneously as an archetype, as we see from Plato; hence its frequent recurrences. The Bird still has the rank of a symbol, of an Image through which the soul meditates on itself and divines itself. But the visualization can become so intense, the soul can become so wholly vision, that the symbol disappears in the brightness of this transparency: then it is its own Image, its very Self, that the soul suddenly grasps, no longer under a symbolic species but as a direct and immediate vision. This is the case in the famous dream in Gerard de Nerval's autobiographical story: "A being of immense stature—man or woman, I know not—fluttered laboriously over the open space and seemed to be struggling among dense clouds. Losing breath and strength, it fell at last into the middle of the dark courtyard, its wings catching and scraping along the roofs and balusters. I could see it for a moment. It was colored with tints of vermillion, and its wings shone with a thousand changing reflections. Clad in a long robe that fell in antique folds, it resembled Albrecht Durer's Angel of Melancholy." <sup>34</sup>

To complete the synchronism of motifs, we must remember that on the day after the night in which he had this dream, Nerval refused to let himself be seen home; to the friend who asked him where he was going, he answered simply: "*To the Orient.*" And such too was the direction pointed out by Hayy ibn Yaqzan. . . . For the soul, "to go into the Orient" is to follow the presentiments that are its memories; little by little, and how laboriously, there emerges from them the image of the celestial beings to whose generations it is akin beyond all the generations of earth. The catastrophe of its terrestrial birth has blotted their features from its memory; nothing here below recalls them to it, unless their image first awakens in its own secret depths. Only then, by the light of that Image, when it "is mindful of its Aeons," can the soul recognize in certain figures certain features that transiently recall to it those of the beings whom it left in the "Orient" whence it came. It can be mentally borne away to them, but at the price of unspeakable suffering when it must again leave the world of beauty and sweetness, peopled by celestial beings. "It was like a primitive and celestial family, whose smiling eyes sought mine with sweet compassion. I began to weep hot tears, as at the recollection of a lost paradise.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

There, I felt bitterly that I was but a momentary sojourner in that world, that foreign yet cherished world, and I trembled at the thought that I must return and re-enter life. In vain did women and children crowd about me as if to hold me back. Already their nascent forms were dissolving in confused vapors; the fair faces paled, and the clear-cut features, the sparkling eyes, were lost in a darkness in which the last radiance of a smile still shone." <sup>35</sup> Here again Nerval's dream is echoed by all the desolation that the mystical pilgrim expresses, in almost identical terms, at the end of Suhrawardi's *Recital of Occidental Exile*.

To call Plato's *Phaeirus*, the Manichaean Psalter, and the dreams of Gerard de Nerval to mind together here is not a mere excursus. It is Avicenna's visionary recitals that present us with the occasion to assemble these testimonies to a similar and recurrent experience of the soul; a definite typology emerges. This Image of the Self as a winged being is to be found in Suhrawardi as in Avicenna, in Ghazzali as in 'Attar. In and to the soul that has become transparent appears this Image that, for the human being, represents its being in its totality, makes known to it the celestial counterpart of its exiled being, the transcendent Person who guides, protects, and inspires it. The Image is the "organ of the vision," but the vision is each time proportioned to the mode of being. Then too, for our philosophers the soul, whose human condition is only temporary, is angel or demon *in potentia*. Developing its virtual angelicity (*fereshtagi, malaki*), it is in the likeness, the image, of the Angel from whom it proceeds. Now, this Angel, who is Gabriel or the Active Intelligence, is shown to us in Suhrawardi's recital with two outspread wings, one of light, the other darkened; from the first proceed our souls, from the second, the elementary Matter in which our souls are captive. The soul in the image of its Angel—here we have the two intellective powers (the two wings of the soul, Ibn 'Arabi will say), Salaman and Absal in the Avicennan recital. It is together and through each other that the Angel Hayy ibn Yaqzan and Absal reduce this Darkness, until finally the mirror shines pure and two wings of pure light are reflected. The same symbolic vision makes the soul appear to itself, and, beyond it, the Self that is more than itself, that envelops and contains it. Whence the persistence and the variants of one and the same figure. The *Simurgh*, for example, from which souls emanate (and whose Arabic equivalent is the Bird 'Anqa), is

35. Ibid. Nerval's melancholy waiting for the night hours that would allow him to rejoin the gentle beings from whom he was separated by the hours of day should be compared with the episode in Suhrawardi's *Recital of Occidental Exile*: "So we ascended during the night and were forced to descend again during the day."

## The Avicennan Recital and Its Persian Translations

also a figure of Gabriel the Archangel, Active Intelligence and Holy Spirit. And it is given the same attributes as Christianity confers on the dove as symbol of the Holy Spirit.<sup>36</sup>

It is this Imago of the soul perceiving itself as a winged being in the likeness of the Angel, and recognizing its Self in the vision of this celestial being, that gives rise to the "cycle of the Bird." Here we shall distinguish three of its essential moments, represented by the Avicennan recital, the recital by al-Ghazzali, and 'Attar's great mystical epic, *Mantiq al-Tayr*. The common elements of their dramaturgy will emerge spontaneously from the translation or the summaries to be given below. The difference in their respective denouements shows them to be three moments, three essential aspects, of Persian mysticism.

### 16. *The Avicennan Recital and Its Persian Translations*

The first thing to be said of the philological condition in which the *Risalat al-Tayr* has come down to us is that it is scarcely satisfactory. Avicenna wrote it in Arabic, and the text, if not well known, has at least been accessible since Mehren's edition and its later reprintings.<sup>37</sup> Since then, however, other Arabic manuscripts have been found, and they should be used for a new critical edition. Then too, the text, like that of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, has been the subject of commentaries in Arabic,<sup>38</sup> and at least four Persian translations of it exist, with or without commentaries. Our ideal project, as for *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, would have been to bring together all these Persian translations with their commentaries, in an edition so arranged that the reader could have them all under his eye at once for the purpose of fertile comparison. The idea is not one to be abandoned, for, again, it represents too important a contribution to the Avicennan corpus in Persian. For anyone who is essentially and primarily

36. Correspondences that are briefly already expressed in regard to his translation-summary of *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. indicated, and to which we propose to return, in our *Sohrawardi, fondateur de la doctrine illuminative*, p. 45.

37. For this recital again, Mehren did pioneer work by publishing the text (cf. *Traites mystiques*, fasc. 3); as to his French translation of it, we can only feel the same regrets, for Avicenna, as those we have

38. Cf. Brockelmann, I, 456, No. 44, and Suppl., I, 819, No. 44; Anawati, pp. 284-87, No. 229. A careful census should be made, distinguishing between the MSS that give only the text and those that give it with a commentary, whether in Persian or in Arabic.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

interested in *spiritual facts*, translations and commentaries are always temptingly significant, for it is they that testify to and reveal the true life of a book: how it has been *lived* in other souls in which it had perforce to undergo a new birth, repeating its first birth that was lived for the first time by its author. However, the limitations of space and time with which we had to reckon did not allow us to carry this study of Avicenna and the visionary recital to the degree of perfection that would have resulted in a volume of perhaps somewhat too-imposing dimensions.

Did Avicenna also compose this *Epistle or Recital of the Bird* during the period of his detention in the fortress of Fardajan? This is possible or probable. If some sources so testify, others have nothing to say on the subject.<sup>39</sup> In any case, what concerns us here is the synchronism of the vision in relation to that of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*: the *Recital of the Bird* answers the invitation received at the end of the latter, it accomplishes the journey into the Orient. The two recitals, the one continuing the other, thus exemplify a single mode of vision; they correspond to the same psychic situation, the same mental projection. They mark two phases of the first importance in the trilogy of the Avicennan recitals, for the third recital has come down to us only in a short summary.

Two of the Persian translations demand our particular attention. The first is the work of 'Umar ibn Sahlan Sawaji (c. the middle of the sixth/twelfth century),<sup>40</sup> who adds a rather long-winded commentary. Some years ago, when we began, to study the works of Suhrawardi, we found ourselves faced by a problem of attribution here. A manuscript at Istanbul contains, among other similar writings by the Shaikh al-Ishraq, a *Recital of the Bird* in Persian, attributed to him by name.<sup>41</sup> Now, upon comparison, this proved to be simply a Persian translation of the Avicennan recital. But Shahrazuri, whose role toward Suhrawardi was more or less that of Juzjani toward Avicenna, also includes a *Recital of the Bird* in his bibliography. In the single manuscript in which this Persian translation has come down to us, its title is: *Tarjamat lisan al-Haqq, wa huwa risalat al-Tayr* (Translation of the divine language,<sup>42</sup> and it is the

39. Cf. Baihaqi, Arabic **part**, p. 50; Persian part, p. 42.

40. Cf. Brockelmann, I, 830.

41. MS. Fatih 5426, foll. 99b-102<sup>b</sup>, where other *risala* of Suhrawardi are given in the margins; cf. Hellmut Ritter, "Philologika IX," 272, No. 7, and Anhang, pp. 65-66.

42. This title suggests a subtle transition from the "language of the True Real," the divine language, and the "language of the Birds" (*Mantiq al-Tayr*) that gives its title to the poem by 'Attar to be discussed later (§ 18).

## The Avicennan Recital and Its Persian Translations

epistle of the Bird). The *Inapt* adds: "work of the Imam of the universe, the greatest scholar of the age, king of sages and philosophers, Shaikh Shihabaddin Suhrawardi, may the divine mercy be upon him." The way to reconcile all these claims was to assume that Suhrawardi was simply the author of this Persian translation<sup>43</sup> that the manuscript expressly attributes to him. This conclusion accords both with his familiarity with the Avicennan recitals and with his activity in transposing some of his own Arabic works into Persian (the *Temples of Light*, the *Tablets* dedicated to 'Imadaddin). Until proof to the contrary is forthcoming, then, such a solution justifies us in regarding him as the author of this Persian translation, which is entirely independent of Sawaji's.<sup>44</sup> In addition, in Suhrawardi's own recitals there are definite reminiscences of the *Recital of the Bird*.<sup>45</sup>

Nor does this exhaust the subject. At least two more Persian translations of this recital exist.<sup>46</sup> One is due to Ahmad ibn Muhammad Akhsitaki,<sup>47</sup> the other to a certain Wajlhaddin. What is the connection between these two translations? What is the original contribution of each? For the moment we cannot answer these questions; such was the reason for the "complete" project mentioned above.

When one translates already existing translations into another language, it is interesting and valuable to be able to make use of them as so many keyboards, as we have done for *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. The thought and language of the original author, as reflected in those of his previous interpreters, reveal characteristics and shades until then unsuspected. The following translation has been made on the basis of the Arabic text and of the two Persian renderings, Sawaji's and Suhrawardi's, of which, we are aware, we should have begun by establishing a genuine critical edition. At first we loaded our translation with notes, drawing attention to the minor differences in meaning and the actual variants between the original and the renderings and to the reasons for our preferences. We finally jettisoned these notes, as necessarily premature so long as a critical edition was lacking, and as necessarily incomplete until we could

43. O. Spies also reached this conclusion, *Three Treatises on Mysticism*, pp. 8 ff.

44. Both have been edited by Spies and S. Khatak, *Three Treatises*, pp. 39 ff. But there are other manuscripts that should be used for a definitive edition with an adequate *apparatus criticus*.

45. Especially in the *Epistle on the*

*State of Infancy (Risala dar tufuliya)* and the *Recital of Occidental Exile*, both already mentioned here.

46. Cf. Osman Ergin's bibliography, p. 50, Nos. 10 and 14.

47. Cf. Muhammad 'Ali Tabrizi Khiabani, *Rihanat al-Adab*, I, 46.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

avail ourselves of the other Persian translations. We do not consider the following translation definitive, while still entertaining the hope that reading it will not prove disappointing, for we have attempted to adapt it to the tone of restrained emotion that vibrates in the Avicennan recital. We have divided it into a prologue, the recital proper, and an epilogue.

### 17. *Translation of the Recital of the Bird*

*PROLOG UE* Is there none among my brothers who will lend me ear for a time, that I may confide some part of my sorrows to him? Perhaps he could fraternally share my burden. For the friendship of a friend is not unalloyed unless, in good as in evil fortune, he guards its purity from all stain. But where shall I find so pure and sincere a friend, in a time when friendship has become a trafficking to which one turns when the necessities of a situation require an application to one's friend, whereas one ceases one's attentions to him as soon as the need is gone? No longer is a friend visited save when you yourself have been visited by misfortune; no longer is a friend remembered save when some necessity has restored your memory. There are, it is true, brothers united by the same divine kinship, friends who are brought together by the same frequentation of what is above; they contemplate the True Realities with the eyes of inner vision; they have purified the depths of their hearts from all stains of doubt. Such a society of brothers can be assembled only by the herald of a divine vocation. Are they so assembled? Then let them receive this *testament*.

Brothers of Truth! Impart your secret one to another. Meet together, and let each raise before his brother the veil that hides the depths of his heart, so that each may instruct the other, and that you may all realize your perfection through one another.

**Brothers** of Truth! Retire as the hedgehog retires, which in soli-

### Translation of the *Recital of the Bird*

tude displays its hidden being and hides its apparent being. As God is my witness! it falls to your hidden being to appear, while it falls to your apparent being to disappear.<sup>48</sup>

Brothers of Truth! Strip yourselves of your skins as the snake casts his. Walk like the ant, the sound of whose steps none hears. Be like the scorpion that ever bears its weapon at the end of its tail, for it is from behind that the demon seeks to surprise men. Take poison, that you may remain alive.<sup>49</sup> Love death, that you may still live. Be ever in flight; choose no settled nest, for it is in the nest that all birds are captured. If you have no wings, steal wings, get them by sleight, if need be, for the best of illuminators is what has the strength to rise in flight. Be like the ostrich that swallows burning stones. Be like the vultures that gulp down the hardest bones. Be like the salamander that lets itself be wrapped in flame, at ease and confident. Be like the bats that never come out by day; yes, the bat is the best of birds.

Brothers of Truth! The bravest man is he who dares to face his tomorrow; the greatest coward is he who dares to remain behindhand with his own perfection.

Brothers of Truth! it is nowise surprising if the Angel flees from evil, whereas the beast commits wickedness, for the Angel has no organ of corruption, while the beast has no organ of comprehension. No, what is surprising is that a human being, invested with command over his evil desires, should let himself be subdued by them, while yet he has within him the light of intelligence. But truly, like to the Angel becomes that man who stands firm under the assault of evil desires. But he whose

48. To eclipse the apparent, to manifest the eclipsed, is, in so many words, the operation of the *ta'wil*, upon which we have dwelt earlier (pp. 28 ff.), and it is the definition of the alchemical operation, in Jabir, as the perfect case of *ta'wil*. Compare the idea of physiognomy in the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, ch. 5, and p. 296, n. 1;

cf. also p. 329, n. 9, on the image of the "rising sun." *Ta'wil* as "exegesis of the soul" eclipses the soul's common and false appearance and manifests and causes the "rising" of its true and hidden being.

49. Compare the meaning of Absal's mystical death, when the plotters have given him poison to drink (below, § 21).



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

strength does not suffice to drive away the evil desires that tempt him, that man does not even reach the rank of the beasts.

And now, let us come to our recital and explain our sorrow.

*RECITAL* Know, O Brothers of Truth, that a party of hunters went into the desert. They spread their nets, set out their lures, and hid in the thickets. For my part, I was one of the troop of birds. When the hunters saw us, they tried to attract us by whistling so delightfully that they put us in doubt. We looked; we saw an agreeable and pleasant place; we knew that our companions were beside us. We felt no uneasiness, and no suspicion kept us from setting out. So we hastened to the place, and suddenly we fell into the snares. The meshes closed on our necks, the strings entangled our wings, the cords hobbled our feet. Every movement that we tried to make only tightened our bonds the more and made our situation more desperate.

Finally, we gave ourselves up for lost; each of us thought only of his own pain and no longer considered that of his brother. We tried only to discover a ruse to free ourselves. And in the end we forgot what a fall our condition had undergone. In the end we ceased to be conscious of our bonds and of the narrowness of our cage, and there sank to rest.

But one day it happened that I was looking out through the meshes of the nets. I saw a company of birds who had freed their heads and wings from the cage and were ready to fly away. Lengths of cord could still be seen tied to their feet, neither too tight to prevent them from flying nor loose enough to allow them a serene and untroubled life. Seeing them, I remembered my earlier state, of which I had lost all consciousness, and what had long ago been my familiar fellowship made me feel the wretchedness of my present state. Would that I might die, I thought, from the excess of my grief, would that at the mere sight of their departure my soul might noiselessly slip from its body!

I called and cried to them from the depths of my cage: "Come! approach! teach me by what sleight to seek deliverance; sympathize

### Translation of the *Recital of the Bird*

with my suffering, for truly I am at the end of my strength." But they remembered the ruses and the impostures of the hunters; my cries only frightened them, and they hastened from me. Then I besought them in the name of the eternal brotherhood, of the stainless fellowship, of the unviolated pact, to trust my words and to banish doubt from their hearts. Then they came to me.

When I questioned them concerning their state, they reminded me thus: "We were prisoners of the same suffering as thine; we too have known despair; we too have been made familiar with sorrow, anguish, and pain." Then they applied their treatment to me. The cord fell from my neck; my wings were freed from their bonds; the door of the cage was opened to me. They said: "Profit by thy deliverance!" But again I prayed to them: "Free me also from this hobble that still clings to my foot." They answered: "Were it in our power, we should have begun by removing those that encumber our own feet. How should the sick cure the sick?" I arose from the cage and flew away with them.

They said: "Far on, straight before thee, is a certain country; **thou** wilt not be safe from every danger until thou hast crossed all the distance that separates thee from it. Therefore, follow in our track, that we may save thee and lead thee by the right way to the goal thou desirest."

-

Our flight led us between the two flanks of a mountain, through a green and fertile valley. We flew pleasantly on, until we had passed all the snares, paying no heed to the whistling of any hunter. Finally, we reached the summit of the first mountain, whence we saw eight other summits,<sup>50</sup> so high that eye could not reach them. We said to one another: "Let us hasten! We shall not be out of danger until we have passed those mountains safe and sound, for in each there is a company that is interested in us. If we heed them, and linger in the charm of those pleasures and the quiet of those places, we shall never arrive."

With great labor we passed six mountains one after the other and

50. Which makes nine summits in all together constituting Mount Qaf as a cosmic (corresponding to the nine spheres) mountain.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

came to the seventh.<sup>51</sup> When we had passed beyond its borders, some of us said to the others: "Is it not time for us to rest? We are spent with fatigue. We are far from the hunters now, for we have traveled a long distance. An hour's rest will help us to reach our goal, whereas if we add to our weariness now, we shall perish." So we halted on the summit of the mountain. There we saw green gardens, beautiful palaces, charming pavilions; there were fruit trees, streams of living water. So many delights refreshed our eyes! Our souls were confounded, our hearts troubled, by so much beauty. And we heard lovely songs, ravishing instrumental music. We inhaled perfumes that not even the most exquisite amber and musk could approach. We gathered fruits, we quenched our thirst at the streams of living water, lingering until we should be completely rested. Then we said to one another: "Let us hasten! No snare is more dangerous than false security; there is no safety save in vigilance, no fortress so good as warning suspicion. We have already lingered too long here. To stay longer would be dangerous. Our enemies are on our trail, seeking the place where they may find us. On!"

So we renounced that place. Though it was so pleasant there, our salvation was worth more. Having agreed to depart, we tore ourselves from those scenes, and thus we came to the eighth mountain.<sup>52</sup> Its summit was so lofty that it was lost in the firmament. Birds peopled its slopes; never had I heard such ravishing music, nor beheld such splendid colors, such graceful forms, nor encountered such sweet companions. When we had come down among them, they treated us with such charm, delicacy, and affability that nothing created could describe it or make it comprehensible.<sup>53</sup> When we were perfectly at our ease

51. That is, the seventh after the first mountain from which the other eight peaks had been seen. The stage thus corresponds to the Eighth Heaven—that is, the Sphere of the Fixed Stars; the description corresponds admirably with the symbolic images of this sphere given elsewhere.

52. The eighth mountain after the first, hence the Ninth Heaven. Here too the sym-

bolism corresponds to what we have learned from *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* and the *Mi'raj-Namah*.

53. Here, then, is the motif of the soul finding its celestial family again, as in Suhrawardi's *Recital of Occidental Exile* and in Gerard de Nerval's dream referred to above; cf. also below (§ 18), in 'Attar.

### Translation of the *Recital of the Bird*

with them, we told them of the sufferings we had endured. They sympathized in them with the utmost solicitude. Then they said to us:

"Beyond this mountain is a city in which the supreme King resides. If any who are oppressed come to implore his protection and trust themselves wholly to him, the King by his strength and his aid frees them from all injustice and suffering."

Relying on what they told us, we determined to reach the city of the King. We came to his court and awaited audience with him. Finally, the order came that the new arrivals were to be brought before him, and we entered his castle. We found ourselves in an enclosure whose vastness no description could compass. When we had crossed it, a curtain was drawn up before us, disclosing a hall so spacious and radiant that it made us forget the first court, or, rather, compared with this, the other seemed of little account. Finally, we reached the King's oratory. When the last curtain had been drawn and all the King's beauty shone before our eyes, our hearts hung upon it and were seized with a stupor so great that it prevented us from giving words to our complaints. But he, perceiving our weakness, restored our assurance by his affability; so that we were emboldened to speak, and to recite our story to him. Then he said to us: "None can unbind the bond that fetters your feet save those who tied it.<sup>54</sup> Now will I send them a Messenger to lay it upon them to satisfy you and remove your fetters. Depart, then, happy and satisfied!"

And now, lo! we are on the road, *we are journeying in company with the King's Messenger.*

*EPILOGUE* Whereupon my brothers pressed about me, urging me to *recite* to them the beauty of the King. I shall describe it in a few summary yet sufficient words. Hearken: whatever be the beauty that thou beholdest in thy heart, without any alloy of ugliness—whatever perfection thou imaginest, untroubled by any defect—in the

54. "Nur eine Waffe taugt, Die Wunde schliesst der Speer nur, der sie schlug" (Only one weapon avails: only the spear that made the wound will close it)—Richard Wagner, *Parsifal*, III in fine.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

King I found him who is in full possession thereof. For all beauty, in the true sense, is realized in him; all imperfection, even in the sense of a metaphor, is banished from him. By his beauty, he is all a Face that thou contemplatest; by his generosity, he is all a Hand that bestows.<sup>55</sup> Whoever approaches him will have found supreme bliss; whoever cuts himself off from him will have lost this world and the world to come.

. . . How many of my brothers will there not be who, my recital having struck upon their ears, will say to me: "I see that thou art somewhat out of thy wits, unless sheer madness hath fallen upon thee. Come now! It is not thou who didst take flight; it is thy reason that has taken flight. No hunter ever made thee his prey; it is thy reason and naught else that has been hunted down. How should a man fly? And how should a bird fall to speaking? Verily, one would say that the bile has overflowed in thy *complexio* and that *siccitas* has taken its seat in thy brain. 'Twere well to diet: drink a decoction of thyme dodder, take frequent hot baths, pour warm water over thy head, take inhalations of oil of water lily. Then go on a light diet, avoid sitting up late; and, above all, no overexertion of mind. For in the past we have always known thee as a reasonable man, of sound and penetrating judgment. God knows how greatly we are concerned over thy state. Seeing thee thus deranged, we feel utterly sick ourselves!"

Oh, what a waste of words! and with what a miserable result! The worst kind of discourse is this chatter with which people are so liberal without any occasion! But in God be my refuge; toward men, my freedom! He who professes another dogma will lose his life in the world to come and in this world too, "for those who attack the first will one day learn by what an overthrowing they shall be overthrown."<sup>56</sup>

55. Compare these same images in Hayy *ibn Yaqzan*, ch. 23.

56. Cf. Koran xxvi:228.—This admirable conclusion of the recital perhaps contains its author's whole secret. Avicenna was well aware that this flight into the

*Orient* was not the act of a "reasonable man." It is really curious that, following Nallino, scholars have more than once repeated that "extravagances" were confined to the Ishraqi philosophy of Suhrawardi, while Avicenna's "Oriental philosophy" would

## 18. *From Avicenna's Recital to 'Attar's Mystical Epic*

The admirable humor of the epilogue to this recital, suddenly cut short by the seriousness of the closing sentences, suggests a soul's whole secret and its whole force. The humor here is a form of initiatory silence, and is also the soul's modesty. What distinguishes the *Recital of the Bird*, in comparison with the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, is that the "pass" of inner initiation has been traversed. To remain in the visionary cosmos pointed out by Hayy ibn Yaqzan's gesture, without responding to his final invitation: "If thou wilt, follow me"—to do this would signify nothing but a predilection for states of mental exaltation and captivity in the realm of pure possibilities; inability to pass beyond their circle can, as we know only too well, be the source of psychosis and madness. To break out of the enchanted circle is fervent commitment and act of faith; it is the positive answer to the Angel's invitation. The Bird, then, had to rise to a level of consciousness on which it felt its bonds to be intolerable, and, with the help of its brothers, who *only then* recognize it, had to free itself from its bonds. And this break could not have been accomplished by any number of volumes of a theoretical work such as the *Shifa'*; in truth, it is what the visionary recitals of the philosopher-mystic Avicenna attest.

The touching adjurations at the beginning are a prologue written mentally *post eventum*. There is a definite intention in the apostrophe that summons the *Bradaran-e Haqiqat*, the Brothers of Truth, in order to confide this spiritual testament to them. Let us compare it with an early episode in the recital proper: the Bird calls its brothers to aid it, but they do not lose their suspicion nor finally give him effectual aid until the captive has adjured them in the name of the pact of initiatory brotherhood. We noted above that when the summit of the first mountain, corresponding to the Heaven of the Moon, is reached, eight more great mountains become visible, which corresponds to the schema of nine spheres that were studied earlier and that mark the stages of the *Mi'raj* (cf. above, §§9 and 14). The birds then cross six of these mountains—which makes seven (the Heaven of Saturn)—and finally arrive at the seventh *after* the first, from which they had glimpsed the cosmic mountain, Qaf (the whole of the

have contained nothing that was not thoroughly rational and reasonable. The Bird of the Avicennan recital gives the lie to this arbitrary depreciation. Here we have his

"brothers" calling him to order so reasonably that we think we are hearing the very criticisms expressed in regard to Proclus, Iamblichus, or Suhrawardi.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

"celestial Occident"), and which is consequently the Eighth Heaven or Heaven of the Fixed Stars. The enchanting description of it in this recital has its source in the indications already given in the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* (ch. 16 in fine). The description of the last mountain, the eighth after the first, hence the Ninth Heaven, is also in accordance with them.

This last summit is lost in the firmament; for, as we know already, it is a region limited by no exterior space (Na-Koja-Abad, the city of Nonwhere, Suhrawardi will say). Here stands the city of the spiritual Angels (*fereshtagan-e ruhani, Angeli intellectuales*): these are the beings whose shining beauty and sweet compassion our recital describes in its turn, though words cannot exhaust their meaning. The impression of a preterrestrial and superterrestrial love conveyed by these beings of light is quite that of the "primitive and celestial family," the "ravishing forms" that appear in Gerard de Nerval's dream (above, pp. 181-82). The Avicennan Bird and the Suhrawardian exile are likewise only "sojourners" in this celestial world. They must return to the life of appearance. But henceforth the commitment and the faith given in answer to Hayy ibn Yaqzan's invitation will have changed everything. The pilgrim no longer walks alone; he is no longer the philosopher left solely to the company of his system and of the surmises of his thought. "Now . . . we are on the road, we are journeying in company with the King's Messenger." The lesson of the *Recital of the Bird*, the fruit of the inner experience of which it is the indication, the level of consciousness access to which it marks—all this is condensed in the short final sentence, which vibrates with intrepid confidence.

What is it to journey in company with the *King's Messenger*? First, for the name: let us think of the "Noble Messenger," *Rasul Karim*, which in the Koran (LXXXI:19) is the appellative of Gabriel the Archangel, Messenger of the divine Revelation. Now, it is the Angel whom the philosophers identify with the Active Intelligence, and it is the latter that the visionary encounters in the person of the Sage-youth Hayy ibn Yaqzan.<sup>57</sup> The latter, then, is certainly the individuation of the Messenger, the Angel of the philosopher, his Perfect Nature, at once Angel of Knowledge and of Revelation, since the fact of uniting with him raises *each* mystic to the rank of "seal of prophecy."<sup>58</sup> He has invited

57. Cf. pp. 357 ff., n. 1.

58. Cf. *ibid*, and above, p. 23 and p. 168, n. 8, the interpretation of the *shaqq al-qamar* (splitting of the moon) among the Ishraqiyun. When Sawaji sees in the

"Messenger" the Angel of Death, his exegesis is acceptable but insufficient, for this would not be enough to differentiate the case of the gnostic. It is true to say that the Angel who manifests himself to the soul

## From Avicenna's Recital to 'Attar's Mystical Epic

his disciple, "Absal," to follow him toward the King whose beauty has no equal. It is by following him that Absal finds access to the King's secret oratory (so, in the *Mi'raj-Namah*, the infinite veils of light are penetrated under the guidance of the Archangel Michael Holy Spirit); and, reciprocally, it is by reaching the King's oratory that he thenceforth becomes the companion of the Angel. This reciprocity expresses, in terms of a personal relation thenceforth attained, lived, and verified (cf. *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, ch. 25), the relation that epistemology described as that between the Active Intelligence and the souls that it illuminates by irradiating intelligible Forms upon them, whenever they have made themselves fit to receive such an illumination. Hayy ibn Yaqzan expressed it: "Each time that thou goest apart from *thy* companions, I walk with thee, thou art *my* companion." To walk in his company is, with conscious piety, to offer oneself more and more often to his illuminations, to the effusion of Forms, to the "pedagogy" by which he brings into actuality the virtual angel, the terrestrial angel who is *intellectus contemplativus*, the angel who in the last recital of the trilogy will finally receive his own personal name: Absal. And this is to "go into the *Orient*," to practice the "*Oriental* philosophy."

The *Recital of the Bird* could be developed. Here we have merely wished to indicate what its connections and its ideal moment in the sequence of recitals seem to us to be. Henceforth Tobias and the Angel, Absal and Hayy ibn Yaqzan, journey toward the Orient as eternal companions in one Destiny. The attainment of the *Orient*—that is, the arrival, beyond the Ninth Heaven, at the royal Holy of Holies—was only momentary, a pledge and an anticipation. It is the beginning of the "celestial pedagogy," not yet the final stage from which the soul returns no more. The attainment of the Orient from which there will be no return, indicating the mystical consummation of the goal, is what will be suggested in the third recital. And this last recital will develop and complete the trilogy of Avicennan recitals, in the same sense in which two other mystical recitals—very different in extent, it is true—will develop and complete the "cycle of the Bird"—namely, the recital of Ghazzali and 'Attar's mystical epic.

at the moment of death (Azrael, or Daena in Mazdaism) is the personal angel of the gnostic, his Perfect Nature, his Self coming, to meet him at the "frontier of the Orient" (as in the *Acts of Thomas*). But this in itself makes clear (and this is the case of individuation that we attempted to substantiate

above, § 8) **that for each gnostic who attains** to the spiritual dignity of the "seal of prophecy," this Angel is in the same relation as is the *Rasul Karim*, the Noble Messenger or Gabriel the Archangel, toward the prophet Muhammad taken as prototype of the case of the Spirituals.



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

We must say a few words about them both, if only to make it easier to grasp the context of the Avicennan recitals in Iranian mysticism.

The recital composed by Abu Hamid Ghazzali (d. A.D. 1111) falls chronologically between Avicenna's (d. A.D. 1037) and the work of the great mystical poet Faridaddin 'Attar (d. A.D. 1229). It seems to be little known; the great theologian wrote it in Arabic; his brother, Ahmad Ghazzali, translated it into Persian.<sup>59</sup> It is even more concise than Avicenna's; in affective tonality, in the level of inner experience expressed by the denouement, it is profoundly different. To permit an evaluation of it, the best course will be to give a short summary, which, generally speaking, will omit only the Koranic or poetic quotations with which Ghazzali's recital is abundantly strewn.

There was a great assembly of the birds; all the varieties of their species and kinds were represented. The birds thought that they should have a king, and that none was worthier to rule over them than the bird 'Anqa. Whereupon they learn that *she*<sup>60</sup> has gone to dwell in a distant and utterly inaccessible island. Such is their ardent desire, and such the firmness of their resolution, that they nevertheless decide to set out to find her, to put themselves under her protection and be admitted to her court. To be sure, they are warned: before you are endless deserts, vertiginous summits, suffocating vapors, regions of heat and regions of cold. You will faint before you have reached the goal of your desire! But the warning was given in vain. They set out. Each mounted the steed of firm resolution, putting on it the bridle of ardent desire. And what was bound to happen came to pass: those who were from warm countries died in the cold regions, those who were from cold countries perished in the regions of heat; others fell, pitiful victims of the storms and accidents they encountered. Finally, only a small band reached the distant island of the bird 'Anqa.

They begged that the King be informed of their arrival, but *she* was in an inaccessible castle. They asked that *she* would at least deign to appear, in order to become their king. But the stupefying answer came: "You have wearied yourselves in vain. We are King, whether you consent or refuse, whether you

59. Cf. Ritter, "Philologika IX," Anhang, p. 47, Nos. 62-63; Brockelmann, Suppl., I, 752, No. 47. We cite Ghazzali's recital here from MS. 'Ashir I, foll. 42<sup>b</sup>-46<sup>a</sup>.

60. 'Anqa. is feminine in Arabic, as *Saena meregha* is feminine in Avestan; we have therefore kept this gender in trans-

lating the name given in the Persian form, Simurgh (we mentioned above, p. 182, the connections between the symbol of the Simurgh and the Holy Spirit, which is feminine in Aramaic; e.g., the expression of Jesus in the *Gospel According to the Hebrews*: "my mother the Holy Spirit").

### From Avicenna's Recital to 'Attar's Mystical Epic

come or depart. We have no need of you." When they understood that they were regarded as of no account and that their desire was treated with the most contemptuous indifference, they succumbed to despair and shame, they felt disillusioned, helpless. They told one another that the road of return was closed to them: their strength did not suffice to attempt it, their passion had exhausted them. Better to die where they were, even to the last of them.

When they were almost choked by their grief and disappointment, lo! another message was brought them: "Away, away with despair! For only they who are without faith despair of God's mercy (Koran xn:87). If our perfect independence of all things demanded that you be treated with scorn and rebuffed, the beauty of munificence demands that you be received and treated with unstinted gentleness. Now that you have experienced the measure of your impotence to know our measure, it befits us that you have here your dwelling . . . it befits the King ' Anqa that *she* choose *freely* him who has become *really* conscious of his own unworthiness." Savoring the joys of familiarity after having known despair, the birds inquired concerning the fate of their companions who had fallen on the road and would never arrive. . . . They were answered: "Beware, beware! If any goes forth from his house to flee to God and His Prophet, and death overtakes him, his reward is in the hands of God (Koran iv: 101)." "Say not of them who have been killed on the way of God that they are dead. Nay, they are alive (n: 149)."

It appears that Avicenna's recital and Ghazzali's have in common only the symbol of the Bird and the theme of the birds' pilgrimage to the King. In Ghazzali's we find neither the initial (and initiatory) episode indicative of deliverance nor the details of the stages of the ascent from heaven to heaven. And, above all, the central episode of Ghazzali's recital expresses a notably different experience: here there is no trace of the joy of returning to a celestial family, nor of the affable reception by the King, who asks the birds to recite their sufferings to him and sends them away not alone but in the company of his Messenger.

That Ahmad Ghazzali wished to translate his celebrated brother's brief recital into Persian is certainly understandable. Its affective tonality can be harmonized with his mystical passion, the pure love that purifies the soul from all desire, to such a degree that the soul consents to the beloved's indifference and obliviousness to it, for none can attain to the beloved in his transcendent beauty. But in compensation, love is greater than the beloved; the presence of the beloved can even distract from love of him; only the torment of the beloved's

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

inaccessibility can bring the soul to incandescence, transform it from the state of lover to that of pure love, into love's very substance. But the theologian Abu Hamid was not devoured by the living flame of love that consumed his brother. The birds of his recital were crushed and terrified by the King's reception. It was not an encounter with self, a face-to-face with *their* Self, but a collision with the hostile, unknown Numinous, something like an abortive initiation, and the birds are on the verge of psychosis. They gain admission to the royal sanctuary through grace, whereas the birds of Avicenna's recital rose to it at the end of their struggle and their heroic effort, and whereas the Majnun of Ahmad Ghazzali chose the desert, even fled from Layla lest Layla's presence should distract him from loving Layla.<sup>61</sup>

Next, 'Attar's great epic will mark a peak of mystical experience. As reminiscences of the Avicennan recital, we find in it the episode of the birds' departure, as well as mention of the seven valleys indicating the stages of the celestial ascent, but they are the mystical valleys of search, desire, knowledge, independence, unity, stupor, nakedness. Just as the King's sanctuary could be seen only from the Ninth Heaven, it is only after these valleys have been crossed that the palace of the Simurgh is revealed. Two themes shared with Ghazzali's recital will be the description of the sufferings endured by the birds and their first reception at the royal court. But it is precisely the "pass" of initiation, impassable to the theologian Ghazzali, that 'Attar *overpasses*, carried on by a mystical movement that is recorded in his work by a stroke of genius.

Like all of 'Attar's mystical epics, the *Language of the Birds*, *Mantiq al-Tayr*,<sup>62</sup> spreads a fabric woven in a definite direction, to which are stitched various episodes and tales, without apparent connection, but which all repeat the same design, contribute to the general pattern, and converge upon the same goal. The end of the birds' pilgrimage is the palace of the Simurgh. The latter is a mythical bird whose name already appears in the Avesta in the form *Saena meregha*.<sup>63</sup> In Persian literature, it figures in a twofold tradition: that of the

61. Cf. his *Breviary of Love*, in Persian, edited by H. Ritter (*Sawanih al-'Ushshaq*). We have made a French translation of it, which we hope to publish someday.

62. Cf. the Koranic verse (XXVII:16) in which Solomon proclaims that he has been granted the favor of "understanding the language of the birds." We may also call to mind the bird Karshiptar, the marvelous

bird gifted with speech and spiritual lord of all the birds, who brought the religion of Ahura Mazda to Yima's *Var* (Bundahishn xix: 16 and xxiv:11; *Pahlavi Texts*, tr. E. W. West, I, 70 and 89).

63. Cf. J. Darmesteter, *Le Zend-Avesta*, II, 495, n. 26; *Burhan-e Qate'*, ed. M. Mo'in, 111, 1211.

## From Avicenna's Recital to 'Attar's Mystical Epic

heroic epic and that of mystical poetry and prose.<sup>64</sup> By a play on words to which the Persian form, *Si-murgh* (= thirty birds), lends itself, 'Attar finds a way to express the state of identity in difference and difference in identity, which constantly forces itself upon and escapes the means of expression at the command of speculative mysticism, and which has tormented all mystics.

The final episode of the poem is the one we propose to summarize here, not only because it triumphantly completes the "cycle of the Bird," but also because, in considering it, we consider what is perhaps the most characteristic aspect and the most accomplished expression of Persian mysticism.<sup>65</sup> Here, then, the birds have set out in thousands; year after year they have traveled, crossing mountains and chasms; they have spent almost their whole lives on the journey. But of the thousands who heard the hoopoe's warning and undertook the journey, a very few have survived to reach the sublime goal. Almost all have disappeared, some of them drowned in the ocean, others transfixed on high peaks; some burned to ashes by the heat of the sun, others devoured by wild beasts; yet others simply exhausted by weariness in the desert. Sadder yet—some slew one another, or stopped together in the same place, and there, pursuing vanities and pleasures, died, the object of their quest forgotten.<sup>66</sup>

In short, of the thousands of birds which, at their setting out, filled the universe, only *thirty* (= *si*) arrived. Even so, they were stupefied by exhaustion, their hearts were broken, their souls prostrate, their bodies shattered. Yet they caught a glimpse of the Majesty that cannot be described, whose essence escapes any attempt of human intelligence to grasp it. Like the birds of Avicenna's recital, dazzled by the beings of light who peopled the Ninth Heaven, they saw thousands of suns gathered together, each outshining the rest, thousands of moons and stars, all equally beautiful. Then, like the pilgrim of the *Mi'raj-Namah*, they were troubled, overwhelmed; perhaps they had ventured too far? They had renounced everything in order to attain the object of their

64. Cf. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s.v. *Simurgh*. We may add that, before 'Attar, the figure appears in Suhrawardi's mystical recitals in prose: the *Risala-e 'Aql-e surkh* and the *Risala-e Safir-e Simurgh*, the latter deriving its title from it (French translations in the volume announced above, p. 43, n. 50).

65. Garcin de Tassy's edition of the Persian text and French translation (*Mantic*

*Uttair; ou, Le Langage des oiseaux*) is now almost a century old. A revised translation, on the basis of a new genuinely critical edition, is needed. On the spiritual universe of Faridaddin 'Attar, cf. Hellmut Ritter's recent study, *Das Meer der Seek*.

66. The whole episode summarized here occurs in the forty-fifth *maqala* of the poem.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

desire; but—they understood it now—why and how should they obtain it from Her Majesty? Why should she be concerned with them? wherein should their miserable existence matter to her more than their nonexistence?

These despairing thoughts, this premonition of utter defeat, seemed confirmed upon the sudden appearance of a herald from Her Majesty, who, seeing the *thirty* birds (*si-murgh*) in their wretchedness, asked them (vv. 4139 ff.): "Speak, O Birds, whence come you? why have you halted here? O band of ne'er-do-wells, what is your name, what your place of abode? What are you called in the world, and what can be done with an impotent handful of dust such as you?" What could they answer, save that a movement of insane love had brought them? Long, very long, was the journey. Thousands at the start, a mere thirty now. Could it be that their toil and suffering were disdained, that not even a look was to be bestowed on them? "O raving band, you who dyed yourselves like the rose with the blood of your hearts, whether you exist or do not exist in the universe, the King exists no whit the less eternally. Hundreds of thousands of universes filled with creatures are as an ant at the gates of this King. And what do you utter but reproaches? Therefore, return whence you came, O vile handful of dust!" (vv. 4146 ff.)

At this moment the situation is exactly like that experienced by the birds of Ghazzali's recital. But suddenly, with one of those episodes that, by a secret of his genius, 'Attar scatters through all his mystical epics, we find ourselves proceeding toward a quite different denouement. Usually these episodes take the form of an anecdote, a fable; the connection with the whole is not directly expressed, for the work is not a rational dissertation. It is precisely the break, the discontinuity, that stimulates the mind to a new effort: the "way through" has to be opened by the mystic himself. The birds<sup>67</sup> are given a mysterious scroll and told to read it to the end; its symbols will cause the secret of their adventure to dawn upon their consciousness. To understand the outcome that 'Attar's rhapsody has in store, we must here bear in mind an essential theme for our mystics: Joseph, the youth sold by his brothers in the Biblical story, is the archetypal figure of celestial beauty manifested in the features of a human countenance.

What, then, is the mysterious scroll presented to the birds? It is the document that Joseph presented to his brothers, asking them to decipher it if they could, when, come as beggars to Egypt, they were brought into their royal

67. We here pass over two short of Majnun, followed by an allusion to the transitional episodes: an allusion to the case celebrated fable of the Butterfly.

## From Avicenna's Recital to 'Attar's Mystical Epic

brother's presence and did not recognize him (vv. 4176 ff.). Now, this document was none other than the receipt, the testimony to the infamous bargain, setting forth how and at what price Joseph, the divine youth, had been sold. His brothers know its contents only too well; they are troubled, confess, and ask to die. Instead of ending in the joy of mutual recognition, shall the long quest that brings the pilgrims to their brother in his royal splendor have no other outcome than a catastrophe and a condemnation? The power of the symbol now shows itself, forcing the depths of the unconscious to yield up the recollection of an event that took place before the time retained in memory. The birds in their turn read the secret document; in it they found recorded all that they had done and all that had befallen them. It was in quest of his royal brother, of his celestial Self, that the pilgrim had set out. Did he not know, then, that if he had been parted from him and been condemned to the quest by a despairing nostalgia, it was because, at the prologue to his own prehistory, predetermining the sequence of his own falls, he too had sold his other Self, his eternal Self, had betrayed his Angel? To each of the thirty birds, as it deciphered the document of its destiny, the same question presented itself: "Knowest thou not, O wretched creature of naught, that at *each* moment thou sellest *a* Joseph? When for thee Joseph shall be king, when he shall be the Guide, he who has precedence, thou at last, wretched creature, wretched and starved, shalt come before him naked and stripped" (vv. 4198 ff.).

When the mystical pilgrim becomes conscious of *this*, his soul is prostrated by trouble and shame. But this complete inner overwhelming detaches him and frees him from all things: all that the birds could and could not do was purified and abolished, blotted from their hearts. The Sun of Nearness shines upon them; enveloped in its rays, their souls are raised to the incandescence that will allow the Mystery to appear. This Meeting that so many mystics have so often tried to describe, this joy in the recognition of self by Self, 'Attar too describes, as only a mystical poet can describe it, for the subtlety of this state defies all recording by the rational understanding (vv. 4205-4230):

"At that moment, in the reflection of their countenance, the Si-murgh [*thirty* birds] saw the face of the eternal Simurgh. They looked: it was veritably that Simurgh, without any doubt, *that* Simurgh was veritably *these* Si-murgh. Then amazement struck them into a daze. They saw themselves Si-murgh in all; and Simurgh was in all Si-murgh. When they turned their eyes to the Simurgh, it was veritably *that* Simurgh which was there in that place. When they looked at themselves, here too it was Si-murgh. And when they looked both ways

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

at once, Simurgh and Si-murgh were one and the same Simurgh. There was Simurgh twice, and yet there was only one; yes, one alone, and yet many. This one was that one; that one was this one. In the whole universe none understood such a thing. All were sunk in amazement; they remained in a state of meditation outside of meditation.

"As they understood nothing whatever of their state, they questioned the Simurgh, without using language. They implored it to unveil the great Mystery, to solve the riddle of this reality-of-the-us and this reality-of-the-thou.<sup>68</sup> Without the aid of language too, this answer came from Her Majesty: My sunlike Majesty is a Mirror. He who comes sees himself in that mirror: body and soul, soul and body, he sees himself entirely in it. Since you came as *Si-murgh* [thirty birds], you appeared as *thirty* [*si*] in that mirror.<sup>69</sup> If forty birds, or fifty, come, the veil will likewise be lifted before them. Had you become a multitude, you would yourselves have looked and you would have seen yourselves. . . . I am far, far above Si-murgh [thirty birds], for I am the essential and eternal Simurgh. Therefore, engulf yourselves in me, that ye may find yourselves again in me. . . .—And the shadow was lost in the sun. Peace!"

This mystery must indeed be uttered without the intervention of language, for language strives to utter it in vain. There must be no sacrifice of pluralism to monism, nor of unity to plurality; nor of oneness to duality, nor of twoness to unity; nor of the identity nor of the difference of the "thysself" to whom "thou" sayest "Thou." In my knowledge of Thysself, may I know myself; in my

68. French and English lack words to translate the abstract Persian nouns formed on *tu* (thou) and *ma* (we), literally "tuity" (*tu'i*) and "nostrity" (*ma'i*), corresponding to "egoity" (*ana'ya*, *mani*, *Ichheit*) as designating the reality of the singular subject, first person, the personal subjectivity.

69. On the divinity as mirror, cf. further below, § 21. We cannot here even attempt to outline the recurrences of this *mirror* motif; we shall, however, note the mention in Zosimus of Panopolis of a mirror made of *electrum*, which seems to have been used in the ritual of some religious cult and which "represents the divine spirit"; cf. Scott, *Hermetica*, IV, 142-44.—This is the occasion to refer to the presence of the Simurgh in the valuable Mandaean legends

collected by Mrs. E. S. Drower, *The Mandaean of Iraq and Iran*, especially pp. 369-85, "The Simurgh, the true history of Rustam and his son," a Mandaean version of ancient Iranian motifs already elaborated by much meditation (Rustam appears in it as a dervish), and, still more to the purpose here, the exquisite legend (pp. 393-99) entitled "The Simurgh and Hirmiz Shah" ("The fountain of water was as clear as a lump of ice, and the water leapt straight up into the air and was white and pure, and spread out like a tree. Hirmiz sat before the bird, and, seeing that she gazed at the fountain, he looked at it, and saw in the water something which resembled a being of light . . ." etc.).

### From Avicenna's Recital to 'Attar's Mystical Epic

knowledge of myself, mayest Thou know thyself; and may thy knowledge of Thyself be Thy knowledge of myself . . . which is also my knowledge of Thyself: oneself being known and recognized by Oneself, and that *each* time, so often as each is before Himself, I before Thee.

What *each* of the birds found at the end of its long and painful quest, what was revealed to it, is the mystery of its own Self: a Self that overflows its terrestrial and exiled ego, its little empirical and conscious ego, a Self that is its whole being, so near and yet so distant, so much *it* and yet so much another that to meet it is to experience the joy of being two in one. The reciprocity that flowers in the mystery of this divine depth cannot be expressed save by a symbol such as the Simurgh, which portrays in a primordial Image this same relation with his God that the mystic can utter, if he attempts to do so, only in formulas that look paradoxical, those of Meister Eckhart, for example, declaring: "The look by which I know him is the very look by which He knows me." It is also the transcendent mystical meaning of the testimony: *talem eum vidi qualem caperepotui*—already quoted here (above, p. 92)—and it is what all speculative mysticism has attempted to say. This is why the "cycle of the Bird" ends outside of cosmic space, as it does outside the circle of Logic. The cycle of Avicennan recitals will also end by an exodus from this world, by an escape beyond objects and categories, the mystical death of Absal. With this, the last act of the Avicennan trilogy—the *Recital of Salaman and Absal*—will be completed.



## V THE RECITAL OF SALAMAN AND ABSAL

### 19. *The Two Versions of the Recital*

One point must be made clear first of all. References to the *Recital of Saldman and Absal* are to be found here and there. They frequently seem to disregard, or simply to be ignorant of, the fact that two quite different versions of a recital bearing the same title exist. The situation is as follows.

(1) There is a *Recital of Saldman and Absal* that the manuscripts expressly state to be translated from the Greek by the celebrated translator Hunayn ibn Ishaq (d. A.H. 260/A.D. 873). It is clearly a text stemming from Hellenistic Hermetic circles. As yet, however, no trace of the Greek original has been found; as far as our knowledge goes, the text may be regarded as one of those that have preserved for us in Arabic some fragments of an extensive philosophico-religious literature written in Greek and now lost. Nasiraddin Tusi became acquainted with this Hermetic version after he had finished his commentary on the *Isharat* (he does not say how long after); he gives a summary of it, then a *ta'wil* that is, unfortunately, artificial and scarcely convincing. We may mention another fact that is of importance for the mystical literature of Persia, which often suffers in this regard from the confusion mentioned above. It is not the Avicennan version of the recital, to be discussed further on, but this Hermetic version **that** the great poet Jami (d. A.H. 898 /A.D. 1492) orchestrated in his famous **and** beautiful mystical epic likewise entitled *Salaman and Absal*.<sup>1</sup>

1. J. von Hammer-Purgstall's old *Literaturgeschichte der Araber* has a curious note (V, 393, n. 1) in which the names of Absal and Salaman are given as designating a pair of legendary Iranian lovers, and referred to certain antique sculptures in the neighborhood of Persepolis ("in der Nahe von P."), which were said to have been named after them. I have found it impossible to discover the source of this information,

## The Two Versions of the Recital

(2) There is a second version of the *Recital of Salaman and Absal*, which came to Nasir Tusi's notice twenty years after he had finished his commentary on the *Isharat*. He therefore gave it a place there (we thus divine the successive revisions undergone by his vast commentary, which should be the subject of a genuine critical edition). Or, rather, he unfortunately found room only for a summary, and he added a *ta'wil* as little convincing as the preceding one. On the other hand, we cannot but agree with him in his opinion that this second version is the only one that is really consonant with the intention motivating the reference made by Avicenna at the beginning of the ninth *namt* of the third part of the *Isharat*. This version of the recital had been brought to him as the work of Avicenna. Since in addition, according to his own manuscripts, a recital bearing this title appeared in the bio-bibliography compiled by the faithful Juzjani, he had no doubt that he was in the presence of a genuine work of Avicenna's, the very one to which the ninth *namt* referred. We have no more reason to doubt this than he had. Unfortunately, we cannot estimate with any assurance to what extent he "condensed" Avicenna's text. He says that he has abbreviated it in order not to make his commentary too long. Perhaps we may judge from the amount of space that he gave to his summary of the Hermetic version; the summary represents about an eighth of the total length of the text translated by Hunayn. If we maintain the same proportion, Avicenna's text has undergone great compression. This is extremely regrettable, for, beneath the dry concision and the clumsiness with which the episodes are connected, we divine a "recital" of the first importance, such as Avicenna's reference in the *Isharat* would justify us in expecting, and such that its place here is rightly that of conclusion to our trilogy.

The ninth *namt* of the third part of the *Isharat* is devoted to setting forth the mystical stations or stages (*maqamat*) of the initiates, the gnostics (*'arifun*). The work thus differs from the *Shifa'* and from the *Kitab al-Najat*; and it constitutes one of the reasons for Avicenna's having traditionally ranked in Iran among the *ahl-e 'erfan*. It is precisely these practitioners of mystical gnosis who will motivate the reference to *Salaman and Absal*. They have, we are told, the privilege of experiencing, even in this earthly life, inner states unknown to all other men: it is as if, though remaining in the robe of the body, they had yet

or to identify the statues to which it might refer, or to obtain any details in regard to this designation and its tradition. Yet it would have been gratifying to determine

to what figures carved in stone the imagination of Iran at one time attached the memory of the mystical pair.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

stripped it off and had departed toward the sacred world. On the one hand, secret and invisible things take place in them: their direct visions of beings of the celestial world, pure from all imperfection and all evil. On the other hand, certain things become visible in them externally: their charisms and their thaumaturgic gifts. Visions and thaumaturgic performances are violently denied by those who have no understanding of them; they are highly valued by those who know. It is with these visions and thaumaturgic gifts that this part of the book will deal. To guide those who know, to arouse their attention at the moment of their entrance into the way, there is no more effective procedure than to shock them by an enigmatic allusion.

"If, among other recitals, the *Recital of Salaman and Absal* has struck thine ear, and its development has been well narrated to thee, know that Salaman is a figure typifying thyself, while Absal is a figure typifying the degree that thou hast attained in mystical gnosis. Therefore, resolve the symbol, if thou canst."<sup>2</sup>

This is the text over which the commentators have labored, first of all Fakhraddin Razi, to whom it is but just to render his due.<sup>3</sup> Avicenna's allusion invited a *ta'wil*, more precisely a *ta'wil shakhsi* (personal spiritual exegesis). It must be admitted that Fakhraddin, though seldom visited by brilliant intuitions, perhaps saw further than Nasir Tusi here, though the latter had the advantage of access to the two versions mentioned above. When one is in the presence of archetypal figures, one cannot proceed as if one had merely to elucidate a simple "story." Fakhraddin is aware that Avicenna's proposition puts us in the presence of a case that comes under the genre of the enigma (*ahaji*): certain properties are stated, which together, to be sure, are congruous with a certain thing, but which are not characteristic enough to make it possible to identify the thing with perfect certainty. In addition, the "story" referred to

2. Cf. *Kitab al-Isharat*, with Nasiraddin commentaries served as "textbooks" down Tusi's commentary, III, 105; cf. A. M. Goichon's translation (*Livre des directives et remarques*), pp. 484-85.

3. This can hardly be done on the basis of the mere extracts from Nasir Tusi's commentary that are given in the collections (e.g., the one published at Cairo in 1326/1908). As we know, Nasir Tusi worked in his turn on Fakhr Razi's commentary, from which he repeats many passages and whose author he calls *al-sharih* (the commentator). In their turn, the two commentaries were the subject of a comparison and an evaluation in Qutbaddin Razi's *Muhakanat*. All these

the centuries. A complete critical edition of them is a desideratum. In any case, a new critical edition of the *Isharat* would have to take into account all the variants given by Nasir Tusi, who had access to several manuscripts. The first work of collation done by our distant predecessors is too often neglected (for which reason, on the contrary, we have made all possible use of them in our editions of the works of Suhrawardi). For Fakhr Razi's commentary, we here refer to the edition published at Constantinople in A.H. 1290.

## The Two Versions of the Recital

is not one of those stories whose fame is so general that an allusion suffices to make the reader catch the author's intention at once. Probably, Fakhraddin thinks, the names of the two heroes are Avicenna's own invention. In short, the best and clearest that he considers it possible to say on the subject is that Salaman must represent Adam, while Absal represents Paradise; and here his intuition is sound. It is the whole myth of the *Anthropos*, the whole history of the Psyche, then, whose intention he divines in the enigmatic recital mentioned by Avicenna: the Exile from Paradise, and the progressive return to the original state of bliss and perfection, whose stages are marked by the successive *maqdmats* experienced by adepts who have set out on the mystical Way.<sup>4</sup>

In his turn, Nasir Tusi, working on Fakhraddin's text, is sensible of his predecessor's efforts to fulfill Avicenna's injunction. He dwells on the two symbols of the Quest (*talab*) and its object (*matlub*), the latter being obtained only gradually, since the degrees are attained one after the other. Salaman would, then, be the hero of this Quest (*talib*), and Absal its object and goal (*matlub*). And perhaps Nasir would have done better to carry his *ta'wil* no further; he was more nearly on the right road here than he will be later, when, having become acquainted with the two recitals, he will treat them as a "puzzle." At the time that he was writing his commentary on the *Isharat*, he had very little data, and what he had was vague and unsatisfactory. A certain story was said to have been current among the Arabs; two characters figured in it, named Salaman and Absal. The fact would at most prove that Avicenna had not invented the two names; as to the Arabian story, it is impossible to see any connection between it and the master's reference.<sup>5</sup>

It was only after he had finished his commentary that Nasiraddin Tusi became acquainted with the Hermetic version of the *Recital of Salaman and*

4. Sadra Shirazi (*Kitab al-Asfar al-arba'a*, p. 814) successively cites *Saldman and Absal*, *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, and the *qasida* on the soul in support of the doctrine of the soul's pre-existence (in regard to which point certain reticences of Suhrawardi's, in the *Hikmat al-Ishraq*, provoke him to ill-humor).

5. Cf. commentary on *Isharat*, III, 106. The story had been brought to his knowledge by a certain scholar of Khurasan, who had referred to the *Nawadir* of Ibn al-'Arabi (not to be confused with the author of the *Futuhat*), in which, however, Nasir was unable to find it. As he had heard it from

his benevolent informant, whose vagueness, however, must have made him waste much precious time, the story did not satisfy him at all; he could not reconcile it with Avicenna's reference. Two men are taken prisoners: Salaman, famous for his goodness (pun on *salama* and *khayr*); and Absal, of the tribe of Jurhum, famous for his wickedness. The former finds deliverance, the latter does not obtain it, without any apparent reason except the characterology defined and established by their names. Perhaps there was more to it; but as it stands it is clearly an utterly uninteresting story.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

*Absal*. And it was not until twenty years later that he chanced to discover the Avicennan version.<sup>6</sup> This time he thought, and rightly, that he held the key to Avicenna's enigmatic reference. But now a question arises: did Avicenna know the Hermetic text translated from the Greek by Hunayn ibn Ishaq? The fact that the two heroes' names are exactly the same would lead us to think so. Yet the Hermetic recital and the Avicennan recital are profoundly different. In order to obtain a full conception of the rearrangements of situation, the dramaturgic changes, and the transformations of the *dramatis personae*, who keep the same names, we should have to possess the complete text of Avicenna's recital. The unfortunate fact is that no manuscript of it has come down to us. Yet it was still known to Suhrawardi, and he had it in mind, together with the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, when he conceived his *Recital of Occidental Exile*: he expressly says so in the prologue to the latter.<sup>7</sup> As for us, we are reduced to Nasir Tusi's meager summary; poor as it is, we are indebted to it for our ability to give the '*arif*' a proper name, *Absal*, which is that of the archetypal hero proposed by the mystical conclusion to the third book of the *Isharat*.

To estimate the differentials of the two recitals, an indispensable condition is to read them and meditate upon them in succession. Here again the ideal and complete plan for the present book would have been to provide a pioneer critical edition both of Hunayn's Arabic translation and of Nasir Tusi's two summaries. Inescapable considerations of time and space have forced us to renounce any such perfection. In the following pages, then, we shall first give a summary of the Hermetic version set forth in Arabic by Hunayn, and after it a complete translation of Nasir Tusi's summary of the Avicennan version. We shall not neglect his laborious *ta'wil* of the two versions, and we shall try briefly to determine not only their significance in relation to each other, but also that of Avicenna's own version as closing the spiritual cycle begun by the other two recitals.

### 20. *The Hermetic Version of Salaman and Absal*

This recital, translated from the Greek by Hunayn, would require an elaboration carried much further than we have been able to do here. We should have to go far beyond the scope of the present study to make a thorough investigation of Hermetic texts or texts related to Hermeticism; its source might then prove

6. Ibid., III, 106-08. menes II," p. .88, reproduced above, pp.

7. Cf. our edition (*Opera metaphysica*, 42-43. II), p. 275, and translation in "Prolego-

## The Hermetic Version of Salaman and Absal

to be discoverable. In any case, the nature and sequence of its symbols permit us to refer them to the mental iconography perpetuated in the Hermetic tradition. The recital shows traces of alchemical symbolism employed to record the phases of spiritual transmutation. This is the fully developed conception of alchemy, which in no sense excludes the *reality* of the operations performed by the adept, but which gives them essentially the meaning of a liturgy or a projection of his inner asceticism. Without this meaning, alchemy is no more than the vain labor of a "charcoal burner" or a "bellows boy." The conception of this *hieratic art* is eminently represented in the Byzantine world by Stephanos, the contemporary of the emperor Heraclius (seventh century). The goal of alchemy, then, is to perform and display the transformation of the carnal into the spiritual man (and this is precisely the goal of the *Hermetic Recital of Salaman and Absal*). To do this was but to realize the program announced by Plato in a famous passage of the *Phaedo*. Hence alchemy is also regarded as the true philosophy, as philosophy itself; this of course does not mean that it is a mere intellectual exercise for initiates, but it testifies to the practice of a physics inseparable from the events of the soul, of Psyche, because the work of salvation as conceived by alchemy is concomitant with the salvation of the soul.<sup>8</sup> This conception is still represented by the voluminous writings of the Egyptian alchemist Jildaki (fourteenth century), by that of the Iranian Tughra'i (eleventh century), whose polemics against some of Avicenna's positions remain to be studied. It survives in the West down to the eighteenth century. It explains why *meditation* continues to be presented and enforced as an absolutely necessary condition for accomplishing the Work.

Since our recital is directed to these ends, it also impinges upon current researches in the psychology of symbols. Here again, we were not at liberty to treat the latter for their own sake. We shall nevertheless attempt at least to outline our view of the meaning of the recital, which is a perfect spiritual romance of initiation: experience of integration and of attainment to one's self.

In the absence of a critical edition, its philological status is still doubtful. We have done our best,<sup>9</sup> but the dimensions of our investigation have obliged us to give only a summary of the Arabic text.

8. Cf. *Phaedo*, 64c; Bidez and Cumont, *Les Mages hellénisés*, II, 319, n. 6; Paul Kraus, *Jabir ibn Hayyan*, II, 35.

9. Our summary is based on two manuscripts: Koprulu 868 and University of Istanbul arabca yazma 1458; we have also referred to the text given in the margin of

the lithographed edition of the *Isharat* (Teheran, 1305/1886), III, 106, as well as to the unfortunately very inaccurate edition published in *Tis' Rasa'il* (Cairo, 1326); cf. Ritter, "Philologika IX," Anhang, pp. 47-48, No. 64.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

In ancient times, before the deluge of Fire, there was a king named Hermanos son of Heraql.<sup>10</sup> He held the Byzantine Empire to the shore of the sea, including the country of Greece and the land of Egypt. It was he who had caused the building of those immense theurgic constructions called the pyramids,<sup>11</sup> against which neither the elements nor the centuries in their thousands have been able to prevail. This king possessed profound knowledge and exten-

10. The forms of these names raise difficult problems. It is common knowledge that the accidents inflicted on Greek names by the Arabic spelling of the copyists frequently preclude all hope of restoring their genuine forms. The name of the Byzantine basileus Heracleios (Heraql) is cited as that of an authority in alchemy; there is, for example, a book by Stephanos dedicated to King Heraql (*h-r-q-l*). We also find the name spelled *h-r-q-y-l*, *h-r-q-l* (Ruska, *Tabula Smaragdina*, pp. 54 and 111). Haraqiel is also the name of the Angel of the Heaven of Mercury. A passage attributed to the basileus-chemist mentions the science of the Balance as science of the correspondences between the spiritual and corporeal worlds (Kraus, II, 314, n. 4). However, it is improbable that the *historical* basileus is meant here. The mythical action of the recital is placed in "very ancient" times, long before Plato even, or, better, in the times of metahistory. Kraus already proposed (II, 57, n. 2), and rightly, to read "Hermes," so constantly is the pair Hermes-Agathodaimon associated in Hermeticism (as among the Sabians of Harran and even in Suhrawardi). We may next compare a text of Maqrizi (D. A. Chwolson, *Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus*, II, 615), which treats of the "Merqulians," a people of Edessa living in the vicinity of Harran. Here we have the Arabic transcription for *Merqulius* or *Mercurius*, and it lies to hand to correct *h-r-q-l* to *m-r-q-w-l-y-w-s* or *m-r-q-w-r-y-w-s*—that is, Mercury or Hermes.—As to the first name, Hermanos, we could easily read *h-r-m-a-y-w-s* instead of *h-r-m-a-n-w-s*. We should thus have **Hermaios son of Hermes (Mercury), the**

king being only an engendered aspect of Hermes. Then again, it was a general belief in Arabic writings of the tenth century that the two great pyramids were the tombs of Hermes and Agathodaimon (Scott, *Hermetica*, IV, 253, n. 6, with a text of Mas'udi; Ruska, p. 64). Our text's similar mention of the two pyramids in the same sense may be an indication for the name Aqliqulas (*a-q-l-y-q-w-l-a-s*), which can be read Agricola, without bringing us any further. Normally, we should here expect the name of Agathodaimon, master of wisdom, divine prophet, who with Hermes and some others dominates the entire Hermetic or neo-Hermetic collection that originated in the initiatory circles of Pharaonic Egypt (Ruska, p. 36). Under the features of Agathodaimon, a manifold figure is discernible: he is the personal *Nolls* of each individual, he is *bona Fortuna*, he is the Aeon (cf. our "Cyclical Time," pp. 141 ff.; Scott, IV, 278-92); thus the mythical age conferred on him by our recital would be all the more comprehensible. Finally, comparing the metamorphosis of *f-r-f-w-r-y-w-s*, Porphyrios, into *gh-r-y-gh-w-r-y-w-s*, Gregorios, we could read under *a-q-l-y-q-w-l-a-s* something like *a-gh-r-y-gh-w-r-w-s*, *Egregoros*, and we should thus be brought back to the figure of the Watchers, Yaqzan.—All these remarks are intended neither as assertions nor as conclusions; they are merely propositions to stimulate investigation.

11. On the two pyramids as tombs of Hermes and Agathodaimon, cf. the preceding note; compare a passage in Michael Psellus' *Chrysopoeia* referring to the legend of the Egyptian pyramids and to their underground galleries containing the mysterious

## The Hermetic Version of Salaman and Absal

sive power; he was versed in the influences of the stars, knew natural properties, and practiced theurgic operations. Among his intimates was a Sage, Aqliqulas the divine,<sup>12</sup> by whom he had been initiated into all the secret sciences. For a whole cycle this divine man had devoted himself to spiritual practices in a cave called the Sarapeion;<sup>13</sup> for nourishment he ate only a few herbs every forty days, and his life reached the length of three cycles.

To this Sage the king one day complained that he had no child. The reason was that Hermanos had no inclination for women and could not prevail upon himself to approach them. As he continued to refuse to do so, despite the Sage's advice, the Sage realized that only one solution remained: to determine a suitable "ascendant" by astrological observation, procure a mandragora,<sup>14</sup> and put a little of the king's semen in it, the Sage then undertaking to treat the

revelations and tablets of the ancient Sages; this legend is connected with Plato's journeys, and, as Cumont thought, the connection has a much earlier origin than some scholars have been willing to admit (Bidez and Cumont, II, 309, n. 3). In any case, this twofold tradition figures very clearly at the end of our Hermetic version of the *Recital of Salaman and Absal*. Cf. further a passage in the *Book of the Emerald*, by Balinas (Apollonius of Tyana), referring to the discovery made by Hermes "under the pillar in the dark chamber" (Ruska, pp. 61 ff., 155 ff.). On this theme of alchemical doctrines preserved in hieroglyphic inscriptions, as it figures in Arabian alchemy, cf. Kraus, II, 32, n. 4; II, 27, n. 1 (Jabir's *Book of the Amalekites*; Suyuti's treatise on the pyramids of Egypt).

12. Cf. above, p. 210, n. 10.

13. *Sariqun*—that is, the Sarapeion or Serapeum destroyed under Theodosius I in 389 (but since our recital is an archetypal recital and not a historical narrative, nothing can be inferred from this date to determine the date of its composition); cf. Synesius' letter to Dioscorus, priest of Serapis, cited in Bidez and Cumont, I, 209, and II, 312, n. 1.

14. It is because the birth is not to be a physical one, precluding a natural biography, that recourse is had to the mandragora

as *materia prima* of the Work. The *psychic* birth of him who is destined to become *filius regius, filius philosophorum*, cannot be produced and "recounted" except through the use of a symbolic material, as *real* support of a psychic operation. The root of the mandragora, of course, displays a strange resemblance to the form and limbs of a human body (or of two human bodies in embrace), but without a head, whence the symbolic value attached to this plant by all traditions; cf. Hugo Rahner's very full study, "Die seelenheilende Blume: Moly und Mandragore in antiker und christlicher Symbolik." Avicenna devoted an article in his *Qanun* to it (cf. lith. [Teheran, 1296], I, 197, s.v. Yabruj). Its name in Persian, *mardom-giya*, corresponds to the Greek term: "Hanc mandragoram poetae *anthropomorphon* appellant, quod habeat radicem formam hominis simulantem" (Isidore, after Dioscorides, cited Rahner, p. 222). Alchemically, it will typify the *new birth*, that of the "body of resurrection," which will attain its full growth by reuniting with Wisdom, which is its "chief" (its head); compare P. Capparoni, "Intorno ad una copia delle scene raffigurante l'estrazione della mandragora"; cf. especially pi. xxi, fig. 1, Sophia presenting the mandragora to Dioscorides; Sophia also appears in two other figures (pl. xix).



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

mixture in an environment suitable for the operation, until it should be ready to receive a soul to govern it and become a complete human being. The proposal was carried out; the child born of this alchemical operation was named Salaman.

A nurse had of course to be provided for him. A young woman of great beauty, aged eighteen years, was found; her name was Absal; she set about caring for the child. Hermanos now asked the Sage what he could do to show his gratitude; the Sage advised him to undertake the construction of a gigantic edifice that neither Water nor Fire could destroy.<sup>15</sup> For the Sage foresaw the revolt of the elements: the edifice was to be of seven stories; it would have a secret door to be known only to the Sages, for whom it would be a secure refuge; as for the rest of mankind, they might as well perish in the cataclysm.

15. Eschatologically, the allusion refers to the deluge of Fire and Water (*ekpyrosis* and *kataklysmos*). According to an ancient tradition reported by the historian Josephus, Adam predicted that the world would be destroyed by water and fire successively, which is a doctrine of Chaldean astrology. Then Seth and his children inscribed what they had learned on two steles, one of clay, the other of stone, so that their sciences should not be lost to the humanity to come (cf. Bidez and Cumont, I, 45); compare the reference in the epilogue to our Hermetic version of *Salaman and Absal*. For their part, the Occidental Mages are known to have held a doctrine combining the vision of Mazdaism with the astrological speculations of the Chaldeans: at the eighth millennium a total *ekpyrosis* dissolves the three other elements in fire, after which the world will be renewed, and human existence be transfigured and destined to eternal bliss; cf. *ibid.*, I, 218-19 and 243, n. 2 (influence of Mazdean dualism on Stoic physics); cf. further *ibid.*, II, 147-48: the myth of the chariot of the Mages in Dion of Prusa, and the myth of Phaethon as symbol of the *ekpyrosis*. The destruction by fire is followed by the destruction by water, a prospect that combines Chaldeo-Stoic speculations with the Iranian traditions of the deluge of Yima; cf. again *ibid.*, II, 296, n. 6;

II, 361, n. 2; II, 376.—Now, our recital also opens a prospect of individual eschatology, which is that of alchemy as *ars hieratica*; it will be referred to again later, in connection with the episode in which Salaman and Absal cast themselves into the sea together (or into a blazing fire, according to the version in Jami's poem), and which corresponds to the initial phase of the Work, termed *nigredo* or some equivalent. Relevant in the same connection is the letter from the Mage Ostanès to Petasios, prescribing the fabrication of the *divine water* by means of operations performed in a glass alembic; after which *two* mixtures are combined and immersed for a day and a night in *sea water*. This divine water causes the death of the living and *resuscitates the dead* (*ibid.*, I, 209). It is the *Aqua permanens*, which is also Fire (*Ignis noster*), the "Mercury of the philosophers." Compare also (*ibid.*, II, 349) Ostanès' prescription to take fire and water, mix them, and combine them in a *single being*. Now (*ibid.*, II, 128), Zoroaster, announcing the coming Saoshyant, addresses his sons as the "seed . . . sown in the soil of Fire and water" (cf. also *ibid.*, II, 30 and 328, n. 1). These fundamental symbols, their combinations and variations, reappear throughout the literature of the *ars hieratica* (cf. further below, p. 215, n. 18).

## The Hermetic Version of Salaman and Absal

To these precautionary measures the king responded by proposing the construction of two edifices: one for the Sage and another that would serve at once to shelter their treasures, their sciences, and their bodies after death. Thus the two pyramids were built.

As for the child Salaman, when he had grown the king wanted to take him from Absal, but the boy was in despair, so great was his attachment to her. So the king left them together until the boy should have grown older. Thus Salaman's affection for Absal changed into love, and a love so passionate that he was entirely taken up with her and frequently neglected the king's service. The king summoned his son and addressed him in the terms usual in such cases. Their apparent brutality is, however, at once offset by the prospect that opens before a Hermetic Sage, and before him alone: the human being must seek to draw constantly to the world of the higher Light, which outshines every other light and is his true abode, whereas the abode of sensible things represents a condition lower than all others. An intermediate degree is attained when man becomes the contemplator of the "Lights of Victory,"<sup>16</sup> but the higher degree is to attain to knowledge of the ideal realities (*haqa'iq*) of all beings. Hence Salaman must abandon Absal: he has no need of her, she cannot help him toward this sublime goal. Let him act as a man, strong in his isolation, until Hermanos finds him a bride, a maiden of the celestial world who will be united to him for the eternity of eternities, and let him thus make himself pleasing to the Lord of the worlds.

It goes without saying that Salaman was not convinced by these most sage exhortations. He hastened to repeat the entire conversation to Absal, who advised him in her turn: "Pay no heed to that man's words. He would deprive you of present joys for the sake of promises of which the greater part are vain. I am a woman who answers to all that delights your soul. If you are an intelligent and determined man, go and reveal our secret to the king: you are not one who can abandon me, nor I one to abandon you." It would no doubt be better not to announce this decision in person. So Salaman confided it to the vizier, who undertook to transmit it. The situation now seemed hopeless; the king gave way to violent grief. His remonstrances remained as unconvincing as before, even when the idea of a compromise was suggested: let Salaman divide his

16. *al-Anwar al-Qahira*: note the occurrence, in a Hermetic text, of this term, which will be characteristic of Suhrawardi's vocabulary. And compare the fact that the

Ishraqiyun theosophists have been connected with a class of Egyptian priests known as "children of the sister of Hermes."

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

time into two equal parts, one in which to profit from the teaching of the Sages, the other to be given to Absal. And so it was decided. Unfortunately, when Salaman, after having devoted all the stipulated time to the study of the exalted sciences necessary to his education, found that he must still serve the king, he had only one idea—to return to Absal and play with her. The king could not but admit that he was again defeated. He consulted his Sages: would not the only way to get rid of Absal be to have her killed? But the vizier protested firmly: let none make bold to destroy what he cannot himself raise up. If the king put this project into effect, it was to be feared that the very foundations of his dwelling would be overthrown and that the elements brought together to constitute his nature would dissolve. And this would not open the way for him to the choir of the *Kerubim* (in other words, the therapy of the soul can have as its goal not the destruction but only the sublimation of the sensible nature). The "child" must little by little discover for himself what it was incumbent upon him to do.

A kindly informer reported this conversation to Salaman, who immediately conveyed the news to Absal. Together they considered how best to frustrate the king's plans; finally, they resolved to flee beyond the Western Ocean. But the king received information of what they were doing; for he possessed two golden reeds, decorated with thaumaturgic designs and pierced with seven holes corresponding to the seven climes. By blowing on one of these holes, after placing on it a pinch of ashes, which then broke into flame, one was informed of what was taking place in the corresponding clime. Thus Hermanos learned where Salaman and Absal had hidden; he learned too that they were suffering all the miseries of exile (*ghurba*); he was touched, and ordered that they receive some little help. But since Salaman persisted in his voluntary exile, Hermanos' wrath presently turned upon the spiritual entities (*ruhaniyat*) of their passion, and he resolved to destroy these. For the two lovers, this was the most intolerable suffering and the most sinister torture: they gazed at each other, felt ardent desire, but could not unite. Salaman understood that what had befallen them was also caused by his father's anger; so he rose and went to the king to obtain remission. In a last effort, the king tried to make his son understand that he could not assume the throne and at the same time remain Absal's companion, for either kingship or Absal would claim him entirely. While he clung to the throne with one hand, Absal would be like a fetter fastened to his feet, preventing him from attaining the throne of the celestial spheres. And to confirm his words by a convincing experience, he had the two lovers suspended in this awkward position for a whole day. At nightfall they were set free.

## The Hermetic Version of Salaman and Absal

The king gained nothing by his stubborn resistance to love. It is at this point in the beautiful Persian poem orchestrated by Jami that the second pair of lovers famed in Persian literature make their appearance, Wamiq and Azra. Even now Wamiq, lending his voice to Salaman, anticipates the mystical consummation demanded by all love in the true sense, the consummation to which Salaman too is summoned, but which he will attain only through a slow initiation, a long experience of integration. The wish expressed by Wamiq in Jami's poem is a summons to that extraordinary *coincidentia oppositorum* that 'Attar's birds were to experience only in the palace of the Simurgh.

" 'What I wish,' answered Wamiq, 'is to flee all alone with Azra into a desert, is to seek my native country in solitude and to pitch my tent beside a spring, keeping far from friend and enemy alike, soul and body both in peace, safe from men. May I be able to walk more than two hundred parasangs in any direction without finding human footprints. And then may every hair of my head, every hair on my body, become so many eyes, and may the one object of my sight be my Azra, so that I may turn to her with thousands of eyes and contemplate her face forever. Ah! better yet, may my contemplative condition be abolished. What I seek is to be delivered from duality, is to become She. As long as duality remains, distance remains, the soul is branded with the iron of separation. When the lover enters the retreat of Union, it can contain but one alone. Peace!' " <sup>17</sup>

Then, in our Hermetic recital, the two unfortunate lovers take each other by the hand and go to cast themselves into the sea.<sup>18</sup> But the king commands the spiritual entity of Water to spare Salaman until he has sent a band to rescue

17. Jami, *Salaman and Absal*, lith. ed. Rashid Yasami (Teheran, 1306), p. 91.—On the life and works of Jami, cf. 'All Asghar Hekmat's book, *Jami*.

18. This episode (absorption in the sea or in fire) corresponds in alchemical symbolism (cf. above, p. 212, n. 15) to the phase called *nigredo*, or *calcinatio*, *olutio*, *putrefactio*; it is followed by the phases termed *albedo*, *rubedo*, *conjunctio*, *sublimatio*. The order, number, and sequence of the phases of the Work vary with almost every author; hence any attempt at a systematization would be fruitless. They must be comprehended each time in relation to the representation of the final goal—that is, in relation to the central symbol under which

that goal is meditated upon. Although Water and Fire form a pair of opposites, they are nevertheless, according to the unanimous testimony of alchemists, the elements to be united, or else equivalent to each other (*Aqua permanens et Ignis noster*). Note that in the Mazdean conception, Water and Fire in their pure state, as creations of Ohrmazd, cannot destroy each other; their antagonism does not result from their true essence, but from a corruption of their qualities that is the work of Ahriman; cf. P. J. de Menasce, ed., *Skand-Gumanik Vicar*, n, and commentary, p. 36.—On the symbolism of this episode, engulfment leading to regeneration, to the new birth of the *filius regius*, compare Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, pp. 313 ff.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

him; as for Absal, she was drowned. When Salaman understood that Absal had vanished and that he had survived her, his grief was so violent that he was on the verge of finding the death he had so earnestly sought. The king understood at last that he had proceeded wrongly. Again he consulted the Sage Aqliqulas: what should he do, his only child was on the point of dying in madness? The Sage has far-reaching plans and immense powers. Jami makes him answer: "A few days will suffice me to cure him and to make Absal his companion for eternity." Enigmatic and paradoxical promise! Yet such will be the fruit of initiation.

The Sage summons the boy: "O Salaman, would you be with Absal again?" "What else could I wish?" "Then come with me to the cave of the *Sarapeion*; there we shall together spend forty days in invocations;<sup>19</sup> Absal will thereby be restored to you." Salaman agrees, and they set off together. But the Sage makes three conditions: first, Salaman will wear a robe exactly like Absal's, and whatever he sees the Sage do, he will also do; however, the Sage will fast for forty days continuously, whereas Salaman will break fast every seven days; finally, during all his life he will love no other woman but Absal. "All this I accept from thee, O Sage," replied Salaman.

Then the Sage gave himself up to prayers and invocations to Venus for forty days. And every day Salaman saw the form of Absal come to him; she sat down beside him, talked to him lovingly. He told the Sage all that he had seen, and thanked him for having brought him this vision of Absal. Then, at the end of forty days, there appeared a marvelous Form, a strange Figure whose extraordinary beauty surpassed every anticipation of beauty: the figure of Venus herself. And Salaman fell in love with her, with a love so intense, so great, and so complete that he forgot the love of Absal: "O Sage! I no longer wish for Absal. In this Figure I have found a sign that has made me averse to the company of Absal. I desire nothing but this Figure." But the Sage answered him: "Did I not make it a condition that thou shouldst never love any but Absal? Now we are nearing the moment when the return of Absal, who shall be restored to you, will signify the fulfillment of our prayers." "O Sage, help me, I want naught save this Figure."

19. This waiting period of forty days corresponds to an archetypal numeral; cf., for example, *Hikmat al-Ishraq*, in fine, and the remains of an account of initiation into Hermetic wisdom (Bidez and Cumont, II, 341-42): "A second god opened to me the Sages' dwelling, covered by a mound of

herbs and dew, robe of the body and the soul. I knocked, after waiting forty days before each door." (On these doors: those of the celestial spheres, each characterized by the metal proper to it, the seven steps of the Mithraic ladder, cf. *ibid.*, II, 340, n. 13.)

## The Hermetistic Version of Salaman and Absal

Here Hunayn's text rather ambiguously terminates. Fortunately, the ambiguity is resolved in Nasiraddin Tusi's summary.<sup>20</sup> Pure love of the ideal Image establishes itself permanently in Salaman's soul as he becomes increasingly conscious of it as the Presence that is within his own being and that preceded everything that he had perceived outside of himself. The Figure abolishes the phantom of Absal or, rather, transfigures Absal through sublimation of love in the true sense, and becomes Salaman's companion for eternity, the "celestial bride" who for the "father" was still only a hope or a hypothetical promise. There is no longer any conflict between Absal and "royalty"; each has become the other. Integrating with himself what he had previously believed to be other than himself, Salaman becomes a complete Man, *Homo totus*, and accedes to the royal dignity of the perfect Sage.

We shall deal with the epilogue only because it refers to certain legends that are of importance elsewhere. Salaman ascends the royal throne and acquires immense fame. By his command, his story was written on seven gold tablets, and invocations to the planets on seven other tablets, likewise of gold. The tablets were placed in the pyramids,<sup>21</sup> at the head of his father's sarcophagus. After the two deluges, of Water and of Fire, had descended, the divine Sage, Plato, appeared. He was told that exalted sciences and precious treasures lay hidden in the pyramids; he made a journey to visit them,<sup>22</sup> but the kings of those days would not allow him to open them. Hence he bequeathed to his pupil Aristotle the task of gaining access to them and benefiting from the teachings of the spiritual sciences deposited there. Aristotle seized the opportunity of Alexander's Oriental campaign. Together they went to the pyramids, and Aristotle opened their thresholds by the power of the secret bequeathed to him by Plato. Alexander was able to bring out only the tablets on which the story of Salaman and Absal was inscribed. After that, the doors closed. . . .

Setting himself to decipher the meaning of this little spiritual romance,

20. The Sage conjures the spiritual entity of the Figure, so that it constantly comes to visit Salaman, Hunayn's text seems to suggest that in the end Salaman turns away from this Figure too, in which case the compensation motivating such an outcome would remain unstated. Nasir Tusi's text notes that Salaman's love for the celestial Aphrodite is precisely the reason for his transmutation into a *filius regius*: "Fa-shughifaha hubban wa-baqiyat suratuha ma'ahu abadan, fa-tanaffara 'an khayali Ab-

sal wa-sta'adda lil-mulki bi-sababi mu-faraqatiha"—"Then he fell passionately in love with her, and the Figure remained with him for ever and ever, while he freed himself from the image [*or* the phantom] of Absal, and by detaching himself from it became fit for the royal dignity."

21. On the motif of the seven tablets (or steles) placed in the pyramids, cf. Bidez and Cumont, II, 338; II, 319, n. 8; II, 324, n. 12; compare Ruska, index, s.v.

22. Cf. above, p. 210, n. n.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

Nasir Tusi makes a preliminary reflection: at first sight, he writes, it seems impossible that its dramaturgy is that which Avicenna had in mind when he declared that "Absal typifies the degree to which thou hast attained in mystical gnosis." And indeed, at first sight, Absal's role and her fate seem irreconcilable with this meaning. But in fact the problem lies on a deeper level. In his reference to Absal, Avicenna is thinking of the adept's progress in mystical gnosis: similarly, our little Hermetic romance simply describes phases of spiritual initiation. In the end, then, we should be able to discover agreement between them. In order to do so we must translate the spiritual experience of Hermeticism into Avicennan terms. The *ta'wil* is not impossible; this is more or less what Nasir Tusi set out to do; but he went astray by decomposing into several "fictitiously real" persons what is actually the symbolic "history" of one and the same person. If we grasp this clue, we can follow the phases of spiritual initiation as the hero's inner metamorphoses proceed. To this end, the *ta'wil* must lead us back to the plane of a phenomenology of symbols that, to be sure, does not yet rise to the horizon illuminated by and for the consciousness of our philosophers, who, on the other hand, reveal such a great aptitude for the spontaneous production of symbols themselves. This is why it is certainly true to say, with Nasir Tusi, that Avicenna was not consciously thinking of this version of *Salaman and Absal*; yet at the same time it is not impossible for us to discover, for ourselves, in what sense it might still be true to say that the Absal of the Hermetic version represents "thy degree in mystical gnosis," or, in the language of Fakhr Razi, who knew neither version, that "Absal represents thy Paradise."

Nasir Tusi's laborious *ta'wil* is a typical example of the fault for which we have had occasion to criticize the commentaries on our initiatory recitals. In this Hermetic recital, beings, things, and modes of being are perceived by the active Imagination and transmuted into symbols. Instead of perceiving to what metamorphosis of the soul this transmutation corresponds, the commentator applies himself to bringing the symbolic data back to the factual and perceptual level that preceded their transmutation. This necessitates seeking rational equivalents for the symbols, drawing up a catalogue of automatic correspondences, regarding the dramatis personae as having external and static roles instead of perceiving them as figures of the soul grappling with itself and with its metamorphoses. Thus it is that in the "table of correspondences" which is what Tusi's *ta'wil* amounts to, the king is set down as the Active Intelligence; the Sage is the effusion that it receives from the Intelligences above it; Salaman

## The Hermetic Version of Salaman and Absal

is the thinking soul, Absal the vital powers of the body; their punishment is the persistence of the soul's inclinations despite the physical enfeeblement brought on by old age; the suicide of the two lovers is their fall into death, from which the immortal soul rises anew, etc., etc. We admit that we have not the courage to continue enumerating this inventory. The commentator has been at great pains to fit in all the pieces of his "jigsaw puzzle"; the picture seems to be complete, but if we look more closely we see that the pieces do not fit together very well, and that the thing is to do all over again.

There is no lack of objections. Supposing the king to be the Active Intelligence, how can he wish to show his gratitude to the Sage by building the pyramids, if, as the commentator believes, these are Matter and Form, whereas the theurgic quality of the material and *real* pyramids proclaims that there is a psychic or spiritual meaning to be preserved? Why, in order to prevent the king from having Absal killed, should the vizier tell him that by doing so he would destroy his own abode—that is, his own physical and corporeal organism? If Salaman's suicide was to be taken in the literal sense of physical death, how are we to understand the events in the Sarapeion after it: Absal's return, the hierophany of Venus, Salaman's enthronement, with his order that his story be inscribed on seven tablets of gold, etc.? It would be useless to multiply these objections; they would only keep us on a factual plane that, on the contrary, we must pass beyond.

Of course, merely to substitute one "system" of symbols for another would be to fall in turn into the error already criticized. For the truth of the symbolism under which the soul perceives the events of which it is the scene and the stake is never reducible to a rational and closed system. Neither the creator of these symbols (and perhaps he less than anyone else) nor his successive interpreters can exhaust their meanings. What we shall very briefly attempt here possesses the value only of "hermeneutic" suggestions; other developments will always remain possible.

Essentially, our task is to decipher the indications registering the successive phases of one and the same consciousness, that of the adept: first the tearing asunder of his preinitiatory existence, then his initiatory birth *as filius regius*, finally his attainment of the *royal dignity* of Perfect Man. We are not concerned with identifying psychic components to the end of comparing them like static objects, nor with substituting other persons or "personifications" for those of the recital; what we must identify is that which a consciousness, in the course of its metamorphoses, was each time able to apprehend under different symbolic



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

species. If at such a decisive moment as that in which the Sage advises the king not to have Absal killed because he would thus overthrow *his own* nature, it is further specified that the "child" must gradually discover for himself what his future demands—we already discern that father and son are one and the same person, what that person can *no longer* be and what he has *not yet come* to be. This is a traditional arcanum of Hermetic symbolism: the adept dies to himself as "father" by engendering himself and being born to his soul as "royal son."

The figures then perfectly typify the states and relations of consciousness. The king-father is the world of traditional consciousness, the masculine world of Day, the world of the official norms and strict imperatives of reason. Absal typifies the feminine world of premonitions, of coming births, of palingeneses still closed in fecund Night, with no norm except the spontaneities of love. Between these two universes, these two faces of the soul, consciousness is constantly being rent asunder, exhausting itself in unconscious projections upon successive objects that leave it unsatisfied yet do not free it from the disapprobation of the world of norms. So long as the mystical child born of the mandragora (above, p. 211, n. 14) has not succeeded in integrating these two worlds with its being, the lamentable vicissitudes and failures described by the recital will be repeated. This integration is the outcome not of a rational dialectic but of a terrifying and painful experience, nothing less than a descent into the depths, such as a spiritual initiation cannot but be. The decisive episode in the initiation occurs when Salaman and Absal cast themselves into the sea (or into a furnace, according to Jami). The ordeal corresponds to what alchemical symbolism records under different names: *nigredo*, *putrefactio*, *calcinatio* (above, p. 215, n. 18). We found traces of it in the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, where there is mention of purification in the Spring of Life, in the region of Darkness. If the soul emerges from the ordeal victorious, it has become ready to experience the following phases: *sublimatio*, *conjunctio*, those that Wamiq's moving words anticipate in Jami's poem, the state of nondistinction between lover and beloved, or, better, in Avicennan terms, as we shall see in conclusion, the state in which the soul has ceased to contemplate itself and can only contemplate itself contemplating.

Absal's death after this plunge into the depths of the unconscious, the only place where the two worlds can be reunited, is certainly indicative of the magnitude of the psychic event. From the descent into hell, Salaman arises regenerated by a new birth. Absal, as he loved her, is no more. His purely possessive passion, a love unconscious of its object and its conditions, cannot

## The Hermetic Version of Salaman and Absal

survive the ordeal. But he does not yet know that Absal nevertheless survives, nor how nor in what sense she will be restored to him. Hence his despair, and the need for further progress in his initiation. Salaman must be brought to the point of discovering that Absal is not exterior to his being, and that the love he cannot shake off without himself renouncing being does not consist in the possession or enjoyment of an exterior object. He must learn upon what alone it is that the identification of such an object depends, must become conscious of the Image that he bears within himself, an Image reflecting that celestial counterpart of his being which enlightens him, which *enables* him *to see* every object in which he thinks that he recognizes that Image. His meditation must so perfectly realize the integration of this Image with his being, with his "spiritual body," that it will become his companion forever, in the joy of recognized presence. The integration of this celestial Double with his own being realizes the *royal dignity* of the great Hermetic arcanum: the conjunction of male-female, *mas femineus*; thus will it finally come to pass for Salaman with the Image of the celestial Aphrodite.

It is toward this revelation of transconsciousness that the Sage's psychotherapy will progressively lead Salaman. To begin, he must put on a robe exactly like Absal's. Here we have a well-known archetypal symbol: it is the very person of Absal, who likewise rises from hell, that symbolically invests Salaman. Now begins a process of incubation.<sup>23</sup> Meditation or waking dream makes present the Image of Absal—that is, Absal in her reality, which is neither purely spiritual nor purely corporeal, but is that of the intermediate world (*'alam al-mithal*, above, pp. 74 ff.) without which the experiences of Hermeticism or of any other related mental universe would be incomprehensible to us. This Imago becomes more definite, grows, daily imposes the reality of its pure presence, fills the soul's entire horizon. And precisely because it is pure presence and at the same time so total it finally flowers in the shining Image of the celestial Aphrodite.

What takes place in the mystical cave of the Sarapeion is neither physical events nor such substitutions of persons or figures as occur in the world perceptible to the senses. It is a psychic event that, in its complete reality, is governed by the relationships, and conforms to the laws, of metamorphoses proper to the intermediate world of the Imaginable. Absal's death is not a physical event that has changed the relation of consciousness to an external datum, any more

23. For the therapy here applied by C. A. Meier, *Antike Inkubation und moderne the Sage and its parallelisms*, cf. especially *Psychotherapie*.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

than her rejection by Salaman concerns the person perceived in the sensible universe. In Salaman, it is the mode of his love, his way of loving Absal, that has been metamorphosed as the moment approaches that will close the process of spiritual transmutation (the transmutation of the carnal into the spiritual man, mentioned by the alchemist Stephanos in connection with the *Phaedo*). The way in which Salaman still thought that he loved Absal at the beginning of his initiation, when he accepted the Sage's proposals, is now transcended. The Absal who was the object of this form of love has disappeared with the form itself of this love; he can no longer desire her nor be concerned with her. By putting on her robe, he has already integrated her person with his being. He must go on to the very end of the mystical conjunction, the birth of the *filius regius* who no longer desires Absal because he is himself Salaman-Absal. Then the form of his love can no longer admit of either duality or relation of exteriority. It is a contemplation and adoration of the archetypal Figure that is revealed in this very love and whose ideal beauty clearly displays its features only by the light of this love's pure flame. It is this form of love that is the presence of the celestial Aphrodite in the Sarapeion of the soul. The soul need no longer disperse itself in the external world, nor enter into conflict with the laws governing that world; it is the substance of this love, even as this love is its substance. The world of the "father" is dead as soon as, by this love, the adept has been born to himself and enthroned as son of his soul, *filius regius*.

Much more could well be said, many co-ordinations could be pointed out with texts in the Hermetic tradition elsewhere. This is not the place to do so. We shall simply refer once again to what has already been suggested. In Salaman's spiritual initiation we witness the obliteration of Absal's Image and its metamorphosis into the Image of the celestial Aphrodite; the integration of her pure presence with Salaman's very being signifies for him his promotion to the royal dignity of "philosopher" in the alchemical sense of the word: the *filius Sapientiae*. It is in this sense that it would still be true to say that Absal—because she is thus transmuted into the truth of "celestial" love, of which her original "role" only announced the distant beginnings—successively marks "thy degree in mystical gnosis" or, in the language of Fakhr Razi, represents "thy Paradise."

The little that we have here said in the margin of the Hermetic version of the recital will serve, we hope, to prepare the way for a subsequent, more fully developed comparison with the Avicennan version. It is not very often that a theme offering two figures of the same name has given rise to two such

## The Avicennan Version of Salaman and Absal

dissimilar versions of a romance of spiritual initiation. The two names will reappear in Avicenna, but for the purpose of quite different typifications. The girl Absal will transmit her name to that one of the two "terrestrial angels" whom we have learned to identify as *intellectus contemplativus*. The dramaturgy will follow an entirely different course. We must only regret once again that we no longer have Avicenna's original text.

### 2 I. *The Avicennan Version of Salaman and Absal*

We come, then, to the version of which Nasiraddin Tusi remained in ignorance until twenty years after finishing his commentary on the *Isharat*. He states that it is attributed to Avicenna and, for his part, is in no doubt that he is in the presence of the recital to which Avicenna refers at the end of his book. This conviction is based on three strong arguments. In the first place, Juzjani certainly mentions a *Recital of Saldman and Absal* in his catalogue of the shaikh's works. Secondly, Nasir is not at all dissatisfied with his elaborate *ta'wil* of this recital; it all seems to him to fit together so well in accordance with Avicenna's intentions that he considers this to be decisive proof of the genuineness of the text that had come to his notice so late; it is certainly the recital that Avicenna had in mind when he wrote that Absal typifies "thy rank in mystical gnosis." A third argument is equally decisive, if not more so. In the *risala* that Avicenna composed on *Destiny*, not only does his *spiritus rector*, Hayy ibn Yaqzan, appear (cf. above, p. 154), but in his own discourse Hayy ibn Yaqzan explicitly refers to an episode in the Avicennan *Recital of Saldman and Absal*: the flash of lightning parting the clouds that darkened heaven and revealing to Absal the face of Salaman's wife.<sup>24</sup> In the passage in the *risala*, Hayy ibn Yaqzan expresses himself as follows: "Not everyone is endowed with the continence of Joseph, to whom the divine beauty revealed itself, nor with the chastity of Absal when he was warned by the flash of celestial lightning."<sup>25</sup> This cross reference does in fact allow us to affirm with Nasir Tusi that the second version of the *Recital of Saldman and Absal*, which he discovered twenty years after finishing his commentary on the *Isharat*, is undoubtedly the Avicennan version.

Unfortunately, instead of simply transcribing the precious text that lay before him, and to avoid swelling his commentary disproportionately by these

24. Cf. lith. (Teheran, 1305), III, 107.    cenne sur le Destin," p. 38, and *Traites*

25. Cf. Mehren, "Le Traite d'Avi-    *mystiques*, fasc. 4, p. 1 of the text.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

successive additions (yet the expense of copyists was not so extravagant as modern printing charges), Nasir contented himself with making a summary. How much did he abridge the original recital? Perhaps, as we said before, to about an eighth of its original length. Here, then, is our translation of the Avicennan version of the *Recital of Salaman and Absal*, according to Nasiraddin Tusi's "condensation":

**RECITAL** Salaman and Absal were half brothers on the mother's side. Absal was the younger; he had been brought up in his brother's presence, and the more he grew, the more marked his beauty and intelligence became. He was well instructed in letters and the sciences, he was chaste and brave. So it came about that Salaman's wife fell passionately in love with him. She said to Salaman: "Bid him frequent your family, so that your children may learn from his example." And Salaman asked him to do so, but Absal absolutely refused to associate with women. Then Salaman said: "For you, my wife holds the rank of a mother." So Absal came to his brother's house.

The young woman showered him with attentions, and after a time privately told him of her passion for him. Absal showed distress, and she realized that he would not yield to her. Then she said to Salaman: "Marry your brother to my sister." Salaman gave him her sister to wife. But meanwhile Salaman's wife said to her sister: "I did not marry you to Absal in order that he should belong to you alone, to my injury; I intend to share him with you." Finally, she said to Absal: "My sister is a maiden of great modesty. Do not go to her during the day, and do not speak to her until after she has become accustomed to you." On the wedding night, Salaman's wife slipped into her sister's bed, and Absal came in to her. Then she could no longer contain herself, and hastened to press her breast against Absal's. Absal became suspicious, and said to himself: "Modest maidens do not behave in this fashion." At that moment the heavens became covered by dense clouds. A flash of lightning shot through them, its brilliant light disclosing the woman's face. Then Absal pushed her violently away, left the room, and resolved to flee.

### The Avicennan Version of Salaman and Absal

He said to Salaman: "I wish to conquer all countries for you, for I have the strength to do it." He took a troop with him, waged war on several peoples, and, without incurring a reproach, conquered countries for his brother on land and sea, in East and West. Long before Alexander, he was master of the earth's entire surface. When he returned to his country, thinking that the woman had forgotten him, she relapsed into her old passion and tried to embrace him; but he refused and repulsed her.

An enemy having appeared, Salaman sent Absal and his troops to meet him. Then Salaman's wife distributed great sums to the leaders of the army so that they would abandon Absal on the battlefield. And so they did. The enemies were victorious over him; after wounding him, they left him lying in his blood, believing him dead. But a wild beast that was nursing young came to him and gave him milk from her teats.<sup>26</sup> Thus he was fed until he was perfectly recovered and healed. Thereupon he sought out Salaman, whose enemies were then besieging and humiliating him, while he bewailed his brother's disappearance. Absal found him, took the army with its stores, and once again attacked his enemies; he routed them, took the greater part of them prisoners, and made his brother king.

Then Salaman's wife came to terms with a cook and a major-domo: she gave each of them a large sum, so that they served Absal a poisoned drink, and he died. He was a faithful friend, a being great in lineage and in desert, in knowledge and in act.

His brother was in great grief over his death. He renounced the

26. The incident is substantially preserved in Ibn Tufayl's romance; cf. *Ḥayy ben Yaqdhan*, ed. Gauthier, p. 26 of the Arabic text. We say "substantially," for if Ibn Tufayl specifies *zabya* ("gazelle"; the word is equally naturally used for "girl," Persian *ahu*), Nasir Tusi merely says "murdi'atun min hayawanati'l-wahshi" (some female desert animal that was nursing young). In addition, the episode occurs at an entirely different juncture and with a different meaning in the respective "biographies" of the two heroes.—A further remark: since, by Ibn Tufayl's own admission, he borrowed the names of Salaman and Absal from Avicenna, why insist, as does Gauthier, upon changing the name *Absal* to *Asal*, and attributing the change to Ibn Tufayl, when, on the testimony of Gauthier's *apparatus criticus*, the MSS more strongly support the traditional reading, *Absal*, than the garbled *Asal*?

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

kingship and conferred it on one of his allies. Then he went into seclusion in secret conversations with his Lord. The Lord revealed to him the truth of what had taken place. Salaman made his wife, the cook, and the major-domo drink the poison that they had given Absal to drink, and they all three died.

Nasir conscientiously adds: "Such is the content of the recital in broad outline." Very true, alas! we are but too aware that we have only a "broad outline." We are far from the tone and the variety of the *Recital of the Bird*. The summary makes the episodes and their connection, Absal's battles, the circumstances of his return and death, hopelessly vague and banal. However, the example of the previous recitals enables us to divine the richness of the mental dramaturgy here.

This dramaturgy lies in the continuation of the first two recitals. Absal's mystical death is his definitive withdrawal from this world: henceforth he belongs irrevocably to the Orient to which Hayy ibn Yaqzan summoned him, and to which the Bird had been admitted for a secret conversation at the conclusion of a heroic celestial ascent. It is at a solemn moment in the book of the *Isharat* that Avicenna refers to the figure of Absal, for the reference is the prelude to such a description of the mystical Way as is lacking in the great didactic treatises. Essentially, then, the recital answers to this mystical intention. It narrates, in dramatic form, the Events that the exposition in the *Isharat* will attempt to describe; it is their experiential verification, and perhaps scholars have been slow to learn that it should be read in this sense. Then too, it is the "spiritual history" of the '*arif*' that must be deciphered in it, not some "allegory" of the soul and body or of the psychic faculties, equally applicable to any human being, whether an '*arif*' or not. We have had occasion to deplore this degradation whenever we have tried to utilize the commentaries on our recitals, and we do not wish to repeat ourselves. Nasir Tusi has rendered a strict account of the figures in the Avicennan *Recital of Saldman and Absal*; and as always, instead of being perceived on the "visionary" horizon, the figures are brought back to the level of everyday perception. Unlike the other two recitals, this one is presented in the third person; but since its hero is Absal, and since Absal has "departed," in order to speak in the first person he would have to come back. But how and why should he come back, if he has finally found what he sought? The deeper meaning of the recital culminates in the death of Absal; and this is precisely the meaning that completely escapes

## The Avicennan Version of Salaman and Absal

Nasir Tusi's meticulous—too meticulous and too rational—inventory. However, its suggestions are not all valueless.

To prepare the way for a *ta'wil* that will be adequate to the symbolism here, three things must be considered. In what ways can Nasir Tusi's own *ta'wil* serve us or lead us astray? With what family or constellation of symbols can we connect the figures of Salaman and Absal in order to perceive all their meaning? How should we understand a reading of the *Recital of Saldman and Absal* in conjunction with the chapter in the *Isharat* that recounts the experiences of the 'arij—that is, of the gnostic, of whom Absal is precisely the proper or "kyriological" name?

The recital as a whole is dominated by a quaternity of figures: Salaman and Absal, Salaman's wife and her sister; the latter's presence appears to be purely allusive, she does not take part in the action personally; perhaps we can discover the reason for this. We may say that we are perfectly in agreement with Nasir Tusi in respect to the person of Absal as typifying the *intellectus contemplativus*; his personal "history" is in truth such as we should depict for that intellect, the upper face of the soul, "terrestrial angel" whose vocation is to unite, in increasing spontaneity, with the Angel Holy Spirit or Active Intelligence, and which thus typifies "thy degree of progress in mystical gnosis." Since the *active* or *practical* intellect forms a pair (whether conjugal or fraternal) with the contemplative intellect, we expect that Salaman will here represent the second "terrestrial angel," the one who acts and "writes" at the dictation of the first. Salaman and Absal will thus be the personal figures of the soul's two faces, of the two intellective powers or "terrestrial angels," which themselves typify the soul's two tutelary angels, the one who mounts to heaven and the one who bends toward earth (cf. *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, ch. 21). In fact, however, Nasir Tusi sees in Salaman the typification of the human soul as such, the thinking soul (*nafs natiqa*); at first sight this interpretation is in harmony with Avicenna's reference to Salaman as the symbol of "thyself," thine own person, and to Absal as "thy degree of progress in mystical gnosis."

And in fact there is in this no contradiction to the typification of the two intellective powers that the consistency of the vision appears to demand. Here we must ourselves beware of any tendency to systematize the symbols too rationally and thus make them sterile. In any case, since Salaman is "personally" distinct from Absal, he can only play the role either of the practical intellect or of the soul reduced to its practical intellect—which comes to the same thing.



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

In Absal's absence, as we saw, Salaman remains helpless, oppressed by his enemies. It is to Absal that it falls to "conquer the Orient and the Occident," as they were revealed by Hayy ibn Yaqzan, and thereby to bring his brother to royalty, that of the Sage, over the material and "practical" world that the soul is called upon to govern. Their fraternal pair thus reproduces the relation between each of the *Kerubim* and its *Anima coelestis* (above, §§ 6 and 7), a relation that, as we pointed out earlier, governs the entire hierarchic structure of beings and powers, at each of their degrees.

The two feminine figures corresponding to the dyad Salaman-Absal certainly demand a more flexible analytical effort than Nasir Tusi's *ta'wil* displays. If Salaman's wife represents the vital powers connected with the organic and physical constitution, hence with terrestrial and elementary Matter; if she is the state of the soul disposing at its discretion (*nafs ammara*) of the concupiscible and irascible appetites, the two redoubtable companions whom Hayy ibn Yaqzan denounces and who here reappear in the persons of the cook and the major-domo—all this makes for a perfectly consistent interpretation. She seeks to subjugate Absal, as she subjugates all the other faculties for her ephemeral ends. She fraudulently takes her sister's place, as the passionate soul is able to disguise its lower purposes as noble goals. But in that case the identity of this "sister" raises a question. Nasir Tusi would see in her the practical intellect, which is, he adds, the soul at peace (*nafs mutma'inna*; cf. Koran LXXXIX : 27-28). But then it is she who should play the role of Salaman to her sister, since it falls to the practical intellect, the face of the soul that is turned toward the body, to subject all the vital powers to itself. Now, the principal characteristic of this "sister" is absence. In addition, the "soul at peace," far from corresponding to the lower face of the soul, to the practical intellect, represents its upper face (the face that is also called *nafs-e malaki*, the angelic soul),<sup>27</sup> and, consequently, the contemplative intellect. If we follow Nasir Tusi's interpretation, the dramatic action of the recital is threatened with inconsistency.

On the other hand, we can discern a symbolism that requires no cause or influence to "explain" it, so often has its archetypal value imposed itself on the imagination, without deliberative consciousness even playing a part. Salaman's wife and her sister here represent that ambivalence of the Feminine which can be either demon or angel, terrible goddess or celestial *paredros*, the heavenly or the fallen Sophia, Aphrodite Urania or the terrestrial Aphrodite,

27. Cf. Gardet, *Pensee*, p. 177, n. 3.

### The Avicennan Version of Salaman and Absal

etc.—an ambivalence familiar to the psychology of symbols. Then too, we have an indication as cogent as it is discreet in the fact that Absal, who absolutely refuses to associate with women, consents to be married to this maiden, who does not appear and whose name is not even spoken. She can only be a "celestial bride," able to represent at once the angel companion, the *daimon paredros* of the terrestrial soul, the sacred world toward which the upper face of the soul is turned, and consequently the illumination of the Angel Active Intelligence or that Angel in person. The *quaternity*,<sup>28</sup> then, here develops the ambivalence of the soul itself, turned at once toward the "Occidental" abyss and toward the "Oriental" heights of light, and thus also the ambivalence of the soul's ends or destiny. Absal's bride represents his relation to the "Orient"; this is why she does not appear "in person" in the recital. The relation to the *Orient* is "invisible" by essence; we shall see later that, for the gnostic, it is to leave, to be absent from, this world, retaining only a material presence here. Such is the signification of Absal's mystical death.

For the rest of the episodes, Nasir Tusi's interpretations still seem to be valid only in part. He makes the lightning flash that parts the clouds an ecstasy that transports the soul from consciousness of profane and perishable things. Now, it cannot be disregarded that the lightning flash, far from causing consciousness of sensible things to disappear in Absal, on the contrary gives him such full consciousness of what they are that it *enables* him to see Salaman's wife, so that he recognizes that she is not his bride. To find an ecstasy here is to proceed too fast through the stages of Absal's biography; what we have here is rather the prelude to ecstasy. Absal's start of surprise will mark his definitive entry upon the path demanded by his vocation as contemplative intellect. Hence it is from this moment that Absal's battles begin. As to his conquest of the Orient and the Occident, we need only refer to the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* in order to understand its symbolical topography. The contemplative intellect achieves this conquest only by becoming "the companion of Hayy ibn Yaqzan"—that is, by offering itself to the illumination of the Active Intelligence. The practical intellect has neither part nor place here. It is curious that Nasir Tusi nevertheless insists on bringing it in, perhaps because he had already made it "Absal's bride." But if there is a deep meaning in conceiving her as accompanying him in his battles and conquests, we already know from another source "in whose company" Absal is journeying. In this case, the "Oriental" identity of Absal's bride would be discreetly confirmed.

28. On quaternity as symbol of totality, cf. p. 360, n. 3.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

As for the state of the practical intellect during its brother's "absences" in the Orient, the situation of the unfortunate Salaman, left to himself and oppressed and harassed by enemies, indicates it with rather dour humor. We find the whole life and world of the body, the occupations and demands of the body, revolting in utter anarchy. Reciprocally, the treachery of the leaders of the army, who desert Absal, shows the psychic faculties betraying the contemplative intellect, because they are unable or unwilling to follow it in its victorious ascent to the Orient. Here Nasir Tusi's suggestions are perceptive and sound. The fates of the two "terrestrial angels" are parallel in misfortune. Yet Absal can be adopted and fed by some desert creature, some gazelle, which, if we follow Nasir Tusi here, is a charming symbol of the pure angelic Intelligences, which, indeed, Hayy ibn Yaqzan calls *bi-abanian*, hermits of the desert. Yet Absal's ordeal will not be completed. We are approaching the denouement that crowns the recital and of which Nasir Tusi's summary unfortunately disposes in a few lines. Still worse, this time his *ta'wil* makes it completely inconsistent.

Yet the sequence of the episodes is clear: Salaman "survives" his brother, renounces his royalty, and goes into seclusion in secret conversations with his Lord. He remains in the "Occident," while his brother has been rapt away "into the Orient." When the "terrestrial angel who dictates" has invisibly departed from this world to attain the "Orient," what could he to whom he dictated still find to "write"? In truth, the Avicennan symbols cluster together spontaneously to give a magnificent image of the state of the perfect gnostic, to which we shall recur once again in closing. This moment is the death inflicted on the sinister accomplices who had been instrumental—of course, without understanding it—in Absal's mystical death. If this denouement in the visible world is the work of Salaman, it follows upon a revelation that he receives from his Lord, after having withdrawn from the world of ambitions and desires. All the events are events of the soul, and they are unfailingly perceived on the level of symbolical imagination. How can Nasir Tusi bring them down to a level that we may justly call biological and that no longer has any bearing on the context of the *Isharat*, to which the *Recital of Salaman and Absal* is the prelude? For his *ta'wil* makes the punishment of the guilty trio precede Salaman's retirement, and does so in order to identify their punishment with the cessation of their evil offices from the effect of old age, and thus to reduce Salaman's withdrawal to the simple phenomenon of the *exitus*.

### The Avicennan Version of Salaman and Absal

This would apply only to man in general; it no longer has anything to do with the secret, "Oriental" biography that is the distinguishing characteristic of the gnostic, and we end with a caricature of Avicenna's intention. If, instead, we maintain the "visionary" horizon under which the real and invisible structure of the human being is perceived in symbols, the whole meaning of the recital becomes discernible. We shall discern it all the more positively if we situate the figures of Salaman and Absal in their family of archetypal symbols.

Typifying the two faces of the soul as *dramatis personae* is not an innovation of Avicenna's. It is even likely that Avicenna took the names of Salaman and Absal from the Hermetic recital summarized and commented on above. This is all that can be said. In any case, his own inner experience was his inspiration for this very personal work, whose entire meaning is dominated by perception of the two faces of the soul, the two intellective powers, as corresponding to the two "terrestrial angels" of his own *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. Now, it is just in Hermetic literature that we find a typification of the soul's two faces corresponding to the exemplary Image of these two "terrestrial angels," who in their turn exemplify the relation of each of the *Kerubim* to his *Anima coelestis*, the energy that moves his heaven.

More precisely, we refer to Hermetic documents that are lost today but traces of which have fortunately been preserved in the work of Zosimus of Panopolis in Egypt (third century), the famous alchemist by whom real metallurgical processes are simultaneously conceived as "types" or symbols of invisible processes and spiritual transmutations. In broad outline, his doctrine combines a Hermeticizing Platonism with a Christian Gnosticism. Thus we learn from him<sup>29</sup> that, according to the teaching of the Hebrews (which in his terminology amounts to saying the Christian Gnostic system) and the "sacred books of Hermes," we must on the one hand distinguish the terrestrial Adam, whose corporal organism is formed from the four elements and receives the influx of the celestial spheres; this is the external man, the man of flesh (*antkropos sarkinos*). On the other hand, an etymology accepted as obvious by the Gnostico-Hermetic doctrine that Zosimus reproduces made it possible to connect the Greek word *phos* (with acute accent on the omega), "man," "individual," with the word *phos* (with circumflex accent), "light"; thus language itself testified to the existence of a *man of light* (*pho-*

29. Cf. *The Book Omega*, part of a long work addressed to the wise Theosebeia: Scott, *Hermetica*, IV, 106 (Greek text); Ruska, *Tabula*, pp. 26-28 (German tr.).

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

*teinos anthropos*), the spiritual man, the inner man, as the opposite pole to the corporal man and as his celestial counterpart.<sup>30</sup> As *Adam* is the archetype of all men of flesh, Phos is the archetype not of men in general, but of all men of light. Now, this name Phos-Light is an appellative; what was the proper name (*kyrion onoma*) of the man of light, as Adam had his proper name (or as Absal has his)? The author admits that he does not know. Only the mysterious, undiscoverable Nikotheos ever knew it. But it remains that, according to this schema, the *anthropos* is not a simple notion but a dual totality: there are Adam and Phos (or Enos), the celestial and the terrestrial *anthropos*.<sup>31</sup>

Here, a Hermetic *ta'wil* allows us once again to recognize the features of these two archetypes exemplified in two personal figures. Ph5s, the man of light, was in the celestial Paradise;<sup>32</sup> he, the innocent, the pure, was persuaded by the archons to put on the corporal Adam subject to the power of Destiny and made of the four elements. In his innocence, he did not refuse; then they could boast of having made him a slave. Now, according to Hesiod,<sup>33</sup> this terrestrial Adam, the outer man, is the fetter (*desmos*) with which Zeus chained *Prometheus*. This fetter signifies the imprisonment of the spiritual man in a material body; hence it is exactly the repetition or the exemplification of the case of Phos-Light imprisoned in Adam. This terrestrial Adam was named Epimetheus by the Hellenes: it was he who received from his own *Nous* the advice not to accept Zeus's gifts—that is, the gifts of the Destiny to which Prometheus-Phos is subject as soon as he is imprisoned with Epimetheus-Adam.<sup>34</sup> This gift of Destiny, Zeus's second gift to Prometheus (the first having been the *desmos*), is Pandora, whom the Hebrews call Eve, or, more precisely, the terrestrial Eve. Prometheus and Epimetheus are thus the two aspects of a single man: Prometheus displays now the image of the *Nous*,

30. Cf. the distinction in Eusebius (*Praeparatio evangelica*, xi, 6, 10ff.) between Adam and Enos, corresponding to Zosimus' distinction between Adam and Phos; Scott, IV, 122.

31. Ibid., IV, 124.

32. Of course, this account is not "history." Phos signifies man as a spiritual being; men are in this sense *photes* (Lights), and, like their archetype Phos, lived in Paradise before their incarnation on earth. The doctrine runs in the direction of the Platonic theory of pre-existence, but it is

expressed in other terms than those used by the Platonists; Scott, IV, 125; we earlier referred to the Suhrawardian recitals, Avicenna's *qasida* on the soul, and the short recital *al-Mabda' wa'l-Ma'ad*, which we regretted being unable to discuss further here (cf. above, p. 45, n. 51).

33. Cf. Scott, IV, 107 and 125.

34. Ibid., IV, 109, and Ruska, p. 29; for further comparative references, cf. also G. R. S. Mead, *Thrice-Greatest Hermes*, III, 273-80.

## The Avicennan Version of Salaman and Absal

now the image of the soul, now that of the flesh because of the guilt that Epimetheus incurred toward him. Phos and Adam, Prometheus and Epimetheus—between the two figures the same polarity as between Salaman and Absal is apparent, and hence the same virtual dramaturgy, while Salaman's wife will be the Avicennan equivalent for Pandora-Eve. However, for the homology to become perfect, a further step is necessary.

The man of light and the terrestrial man, Prometheus and Epimetheus, prepare another typification that is known to the anthropopsychology of Hermetism and that evidences a different source.<sup>35</sup> It is the doctrine of the two souls or the two faces of the soul, which in Avicennism actually corresponds much better to a Hermetic Platonism than to the Aristotelian doctrine taken literally. Here the schema of the dyad undergoes a modification in the direction of the Avicennan schema of the two "terrestrial angels." There is no longer the opposition between man of light and carnal man, between two irreconcilable worlds, but a contrast between two souls or rather between two powers of the same soul, hence both belonging to the same world, but one of which is directed toward their original world, the other toward the world in which they are both incarnated. The higher of the two souls emanates from the First Nous, and it shares in the power of the Demiurge who is the Second Nous. As the Second Nous likewise emanates from the First, the higher soul of the human individual is, so to speak, a "younger brother of the Demiurge." Here again we must recall the Avicennan analogy: the human soul stands to the Angel who is the Active Intelligence in the same relation in which each Soul stands to the Intelligence from which it emanates, whence the constantly affirmed kinship between *Anima coelestis* and *anima humana*.

As for the lower soul, it is that which the celestial spheres emit into us by their circular motion. It is put into bodies at birth by the operation and influence of the stars, which are the instruments of Destiny, and these astral influences govern it throughout life.<sup>36</sup> Thus, then, this soul, which is the lower

35. Cf. "Abammonis ad Porphyrium responsum," in Scott, IV, 78.—As for the Platonists, cf. Proclus, *De providentia et fato* (cited by Scott, IV, 77): "Omnes Platonis amatores duplicem divulgantes animam"—"All Platonists say that the human soul is double" (we point out, above, the difference from the Hermetic typification).

36. Does the lower soul begin to exist only at the moment of birth, or did it exist

before its incarnation? The question does not arise except in this schema, which modifies the Hermetic schema previously outlined. There, since Adam is the medium of the incarnation of Phos, there would be no reason for inquiring into the incarnation of Adam, his pre-existence, or his immortality: he *is* the flesh in which Phos is incarnated. But here we have two souls coming from the world of pre-existence; every thinker

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

soul because it is turned toward corporeal things and is appointed to govern them, is present in the body from the moment of birth. The higher soul does not enter the lower soul until later; the man of light, the human *Nous*, is not incarnated and awakened in man except as the years pass, at earliest at the beginning of adolescence, and even so only a small number of human beings can ever be said to possess the *Nous*. This is why in Avicenna's recital too, Absal, who is the *Nous*, the contemplative intellect, the man of light, is presented as younger than his brother Salaman. So, while the man in whom the lower soul predominates is subject to Destiny, the man whose soul instead gains complete freedom for its activity and subjugates the lower soul (as the latter should subjugate the vital powers)—such a "Promethean" man rises above Destiny—that is, above the laws of nature and of the material world subject to the influence of the stars; his life is united with that of the *noetoi theoi*—in Avicennan terms, with the *Kerubim*, the Active Intelligences and the celestial Souls. He dies mystically to this world, as Absal dies. . . .

And such is certainly the case typified in the "history" of Absal, and if, on their side, the Hermetic archetypes aid us in deciphering it, this is because the flowering of symbols is not left to chance or to the laborious calculations of a "code." Even without any intervention from filiation or from historical causation or influence, the figures under which the same experiences of the soul are perceived will regroup themselves in homologous positions. Salaman and Absal are not exactly Adam and Phos, the man of light and the carnal man, but they are the two faces of the incarnated soul that correspond to them: the face that is turned toward the corporeal world, which it governs, and the face that is turned toward the world of light, from which it proceeds and which it aspires to find again. Prometheus and Epimetheus are transmuted and homologized as the "two terrestrial angels" of the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*.

Hence the beginning of the chapter in the *Isharat* devoted to describing the presumably had to decide the question in accordance with whether or not he admitted the immortality of the lower soul; cf. Scott, IV, 78, n. 2. In sum, it is this lower soul that is in the proper sense the incarnated soul. In regard to the higher soul, there is a sort of hesitation: the schemata appear in duplicate; did the celestial counterpart of the soul remain in Paradise, or was it incarnated too? The answer may be yes or no (cf. the ambivalence of the Fravarti in Mazdaism). Here we may well reflect upon the structure that, in Avicenna, duplicates each degree of being, upper face and lower face. The lower face of a degree is the upper face of the next, in the sense that it belongs to them both, whence its ambivalence. This is why we have sought to show how the soul simultaneously awakens to its own inner duality and to the dual that it forms with the degree above it.

### The Avicennan Version of Salaman and Absal

mystical experience was indeed the fitting place for Avicenna's reference to Salaman and Absal. The intention is perfectly explicit when Avicenna declares that Absal "typifies thy degree of progress in mystical gnosis." All the descriptions of the states and experiences of the '*arif*' are to be read as being Absal's own story. Absal is *the* '*arif*'; it is his spiritual "career" that is described; context and recital are to be read together. Poor as is the summary that has come down to us, its allusions refer to spiritual moments and stages analyzed in the context of the *Isharat*. In other terms, what meditation on the *Recital of Salaman and Absal* should perceive is the autobiography, the adventure, of the mystical soul, not some trite "allegory" of the union of soul and body without any bearing on a context of mysticism. Absal's death is a mystical death: it is neither the natural *exitus* nor the physiological decline of the intellectual faculties, as Nasir Tusi far too hastily interpreted it. Or, rather, it is the triumphant anticipation by virtue of which the mystic no longer dies by death, but emerges from this world at last alive.

The posteriority of Absal's birth in respect to Salaman's is far more than a *fact*; it is a *vision*; the Hermetic text cited above illustrates the motif with sufficient eloquence. The goodhearted Salaman would be prepared to accept all sorts of compromises; Absal's behavior is that of the "Promethean" man. The lightning flash is the primordial psychic event of our visionary recitals; it marks the break with the sequence of events that have their cause and their place in the physical world perceptible to the senses and to ordinary reason. The exile of Suhrawardi's *Recital of Occidental Exile* is warned by lightning flashes of the "events" that take place (and have *their* place) in the forbidden region of the Najd. It is on a night lurid with lightning that Gabriel the Angel comes to invite the Prophet—and in his person every adept who will reproduce his case—to the celestial ascent of the *Mi'raj* (above, § 14). It is now that Absal's battles begin. Each of his returns to Salaman will presage a new phase of them. First there is his conquest of the Orient and the Occident. In this phase he becomes accustomed to "keeping company" with Hayy ibn Yaqzan; through the illumination of the Active Intelligence, ideal Forms are emanated upon him, those that are Ideas informing the matter of the "Occidental" world and those that, in the "Oriental" world, are pure intelligible Ideas and themselves Intelligences. This can also be the journey of the Bird to the Eighth, or even to the Ninth, Heaven.

On his first return, Absal is not yet secure against the aggressions of Salaman's wife. Until now he has been the hero of philosophical knowledge;



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

by his second departure, his relation to the "Orient" will enter an entirely new phase. He enters upon a road in which he will be betrayed and abandoned by the forces that had thitherto been at his service; whether because of impotence or of repugnance on the part of its powers and faculties, the Bird cannot penetrate to the royal oratory accompanied by all of them. If it enters, then departs to enter it again, this is possible only in the company of the "King's Messenger," and we already know that these "messengers" are proud figures of the desert, having no contact with the cities of the senses and of sensible things. Then too, as the *Recital of the Bird* informed us, it is only in the desert that the hidden depth of the soul can be uncovered and exposed to the visitations of ecstasy. This is why Absal is safe and sound in the desert, although his enemies, those who see only the visible and the apparent, have left him for dead. At the same time, however, things go ill with Salaman. It is difficult for the soul to absent itself in the desert and at the same time to keep intact the sovereignty of the "practical intellect" over the city of material things ever on the alert to revolt and take their revenge.

Absal's second return will restore things to order, but to an order that from thenceforth is meant to serve only the intentions and goals of the *'arif*. This new order prepares the denouement: Absal's death and Salaman's seclusion. What this seclusion signifies we shall learn from the sober eloquence of the fine closing characterology of the gnostic. Here we enter the third phase of the recital. Salaman's wife sees her hopes and interests definitely menaced. In the major-domo and the cook, Nasir Tusi identified the irascible and concupiscible powers. In our turn we have seen in them the two redoubtable companions denounced by Hayy ibn Yaqzan, and we already knew that these companions are not merely two faculties of the individual microcosm; they are all the demons and demonic powers that agitate and darken the realm of the soul: all greeds and all cowardices, ambitions and their furies, betrayals and their hypocrisies, all the very human powers that these demons stir up. Under this wholly inner aspect, the perception of the drama becomes striking, indeed. For it is quite true to say that these demons have given their cup of poison to the pure Absal, who refused to compromise with them, have filled him with bitterness and disgust even unto death. No mystical vocation has escaped passing through this most bitter experience, and it was said in the prologue to the *Recital of the Bird*: "Brothers . . . take poison, that you may remain alive."

Those who are the instruments of this "death" cannot even comprehend **its**

## The Avicennan Version of Salaman and Absal

meaning; for that to which they have caused Absal to die is precisely the hell that bound and crucified his freedom for the "Orient." Henceforth he is wholly *free for that Orient*. Nasir Tusi has elsewhere admirably analyzed the significance of such a death.<sup>37</sup> It is not a matter of corporal presence or absence. It is a way of comprehending this world, the particular way proper to the mystic. This is why there are beings who, externally, are present in this world, whereas in fact they are no longer in it and perhaps never even came into it. There are others of whom men say that they are dead, that they have "departed," whereas in fact they have not left this world and will never leave it. For to leave this world, it is not enough to die physically; one must be alive, alive like Absal, dead in the opinion of this world.

This is but a brief sketch, scarcely developing the concise drama of Salaman and Absal. Our intention was neither to establish a rational equilibrium among all the figures nor to exhaust all their meanings; such an intention would here betray its very object. We have simply wished to suggest this: that the student reflect upon the entire ninth *namt* of the last book of the *Isharat*, keeping the figure of Absal in mind. The figure takes on a life that overflows the meager summary for which, after all, we must be grateful to Nasir Tusi, and the entire chapter elucidates itself as an autobiography, as the final act that comes to conclude and seal the last of the three Avicennan recitals.

The chapter is excellently summarized by Louis Gardet in his recent book, to which we can only refer here.<sup>38</sup> The spiritual itinerary begins with the act of personal will (*iradat*) on the part of the novice, to whom the first mystical stage proposes a threefold goal: renunciation of all illusory contingencies; establishment of the true relationship that should prevail between the two faces of the soul ("the angel who dictates and the angel who writes," Absal and Salaman), so that the imaginative power is drawn toward the Images that are homogeneous with the celestial world, and turned from those that are connected with the lower world; and, finally, making the subliminal consciousness (*sirr*) pure and subtle (*taltif*) in view of its awakening. Then, in the equilibrium of this relationship to sensible things, Salaman will enjoy his true royalty. For it is chiefly his magisterium that is affected by the proposed practices: practice of liturgical acts and acts of worship, listening to spiritual concerts (*sama'*),

37. Cf. *The "Rawdatu't Taslim,"* ed. Ivanow, p. 63 of the text; cf. our "Cyclical Time," pp. 171-72.

38. Cf. *La Pensée religieuse d'Avicenne*, pp. 176-83; for the chapter in French translation, A. M. Goichon, *Le Livre des directives*, pp. 491 ff.; for the text, lith. (Teheran, 1305), III, 114 ff.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

exercise of the chaste love that is without concupiscence or desire, that is contemplation and pure adoration of the divine epiphany in the beauty of sensible Forms.<sup>39</sup>

On his side, Absal becomes free to respond unreservedly to Hayy ibn Yaqzan's invitation: "If thou wilt, follow me toward Him." Until now, he has followed him intermittently. Henceforth the two evil companions are cast aside ("when thou turnest from them, thou journeyest with me": there is no further obstacle on the road of Tobias and the Angel). Here again we may refer to what there has already been occasion to point out: the personal character of the relationship, the special kind of piety, which unites the Angel Active Intelligence and his adept, Hayy ibn Yaqzan and Absal; mysticism and angelology are so intimately associated that we hardly see where or why it should be thought necessary at all costs to insert a sort of dilemma between them, the problem whether, at this moment of its spiritual ascent, it is God or its Angel that the soul encounters. What is certain is that, in Avicennan terms, the contemplative intellect, Absal, is ordained to the illumination that it receives from the Angel, but this illumination, the irradiation of Forms that it received, is also the very same light of which it is itself made (light constituting the being of the soul that emanates from the right wing of the Angel, his wing of light, in Suhrawardi's recital). Thus it is its own light that grows more intense, its own being that is progressively brought to incandescence. This conjunction with the Active Intelligence, intermittent at first, gradually tends to become stable and habitual. At first, there are "instants," "swift flashes rising and quenched."<sup>40</sup> Little by little this state enwraps the mystic, descends upon him without further effort. Does his eye fall on a thing or a being? At once he turns from it to look toward the world of the Angel, the being or thing having sufficed to remind him of something belonging to the celestial world. Then a new visitation enwraps him. Almost, he sees in each thing and each being the true

39. Nasir Tusi makes this the point of departure for a long and excellent development. He cites the fundamental distinction among all our mystics between love in the true sense (*'ishq haqiqi*) and love in the metaphorical sense (*'ishq majazi*), the latter being subdivided into carnal and animal love (*haywani*) or possessive concupiscence and psychic love (*nafsani*); the principle of the latter is a resemblance, a certain conformity (*mushakala*) in essence, between the soul of the lover and the soul of the beloved. Here, "meta-phoric" takes on its etymological meaning of transferral, sublimation, for it prepares him who practices it for "love in the true sense," the love that reveals and to which is revealed the real beloved (*al-ma'shuq al-haqiqi*) in every beloved (cf. lith., III, 116).

40. Compare Suhrawardi, *Hikmat al-Ishraq*, § 272 of our edition, and the first part of his *Risala-e Sqfir-e Simurgh*.

## The Avicennan Version of Salaman and Absal

Being, so that the succession of instants gives place to a state of quietude (*sakina*). "The swift illumination of the lightning flash becomes a shining flame. For him an intimate knowledge is now realized, stable and continuous, like a constant companionship, in which he rejoices in his joy."<sup>41</sup>

Absal is nearing the goal. Until now, something of what he experienced inwardly still showed outwardly. But the further he penetrates into this intimate knowledge, the more do its external tokens diminish. It would be hard to bring together into a more concise and striking formula than Avicenna's the whole mystery of Absal's death, the paradox of his invisible disappearance from the visible world, a disappearance inapprehensible to those about him, since they believe that he is still there, and cannot understand or even sense the mystery of his *death*: "He is absent though he is present, he is on the way though he remains where he is" ("wa-huwa gha'ibun hadiran wa-huwa za'inun muqiman").<sup>42</sup> How should there be an external witness to his journey in union with the Angel? How should it be known that he is already "in the Orient"? Henceforth, he has "departed," he can no longer even choose to stop. Whatever he contemplates, it is something of the celestial world that he contemplates. Without warning, he turns from the world of illusion to be wholly absorbed in the world of the Veritable, while the Unwitting (*ghafilun*) yet surround him on all sides.<sup>43</sup> And this is why it is true to say, with Fakhraddin Razi, that Absal typifies "thy Paradise."

Henceforth he is done with all phases of asceticism and training (*riyada*). His intimate consciousness (*sirr*) has become a perfectly polished *mirror*; the upper face of the soul is wholly "oriented," it faces the true Being; it reflects all Lights, it lives on earth the very life of the angelic Intelligences and the celestial Souls. Here the characteristics of Avicenna's mysticism become clear; far from pursuing the abolition of the individuality, it transfigures and eternizes it in a sense that doubtless escapes our categories and earlier (§ 8) led us to raise the question of a specific individuality for the soul when it attains to full angelic existence or to its first beginnings. For Absal has now become an *Aeon*, a *saeculum intelligibile*,<sup>44</sup> a monad that is an entire universe. Here is the full flowering of the angelic pedagogy previously described (§ 8), and in which,

41. Lith., III, 116.

42. Ibid., III, 117.

43. Ibid., III, 118.

44. Cf. this expression in de Vaux, *Notes*, p. 33, and above, p. 116, n. 172;

compare Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, ed. E. R. Dodds, p. 229, commentary on prop. 54 (the Aeons); our "Cyclical Time," pp. 136 ff.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

for all the celestial Intelligences, Absal is as it were their child, whom they solicitously bring to perfection.

If at the final stage of true contemplation (*mushahada*) Absal departs from and disappears from himself, is hidden from "his soul," this is neither absorption nor resorption, nor cessation of his own being. Nasir Tusi's commentary is happily emphatic here. This disappearance or this absence does not exclude the soul's contemplating itself. But previously the soul contemplates itself as adorned with the beauty of all the divine vestiges, and as conscious of its adornment; the soul enjoyed and rejoiced in the soul. Henceforth it contemplates itself only in a metaphorical sense (*majaz*); it is no longer conscious of itself except in relation to the Beloved in the true sense; to contemplate itself is *to contemplate itself contemplating*—that is, to contemplate itself contemplating Him. "And that is attainment in the true sense" (*wa-yahuqu'l-wusulu*).<sup>45</sup> Hence, if it is true to say that its contemplation is without intermediary, this is because no Light can veil the Light or its endless reflections. However, the individuated soul, as *mirror*, itself remains the *medium* of its contemplation *without intermediary*, for it is in this mirror that it contemplates the reflection of the Light. It contemplates the true Being "by contemplating itself contemplating Him."—There is no Other veil, but this veil could not be taken away except with the soul's individuality, for this veiling forever constitutes the mystery of its eternal being. It is with this same veil that the Angel veils his face to adore, in the mystery of his own contemplation, the very mystery of his being and his beauty, a mystery that is this contemplation itself.

Absal being now mystically "dead," and Salaman surviving him in a like mystical sense, what of Salaman's abdication of his royalty and the punishment of the three criminals? The question comes down to considering what royalty the practical power of the soul (*intellectus practicus*) could still exercise in this world. The soul can no longer share the world's ambitions, or pursue its goals, or be subject to its laws. The death of the three criminals signifies the total disappearance of their influence, of their claims, and of their ambitions, which are entirely those of men in general, not those of "men of light." Now there is nothing left in these things for Salaman to administer or govern; he withdraws from them, he too "goes into seclusion." And this is the admirable state of spiritual freedom described at the end of the chapter in the *Isharat*. Total freedom in respect to the choice between a life of misery or of happiness. Some

45. Lith., III, 118.

### The Avicennan Version of Salaman and Absal

deliberately choose the first. Others, on the contrary—and this is perhaps a profound characteristic of Avicenna's personal psychology—others prefer what is best and most beautiful, not in order to enjoy a possession, but simply out of horror for all that is degenerate and abortive, all that is ugliness and impotence. These gnostics demand beauty in all things, but because beauty is closer to that to which they attach and apply themselves with all their passionate desire.—As to his relations with men, the perfect gnostic no longer accepts illusory ranks and distinctions. He counsels good, he feels compassion. He is brave, he does not fear death, he can forgive. To reach this state, Salaman must indeed have subdued all the powers of covetousness, wrath, and vengeance that govern the general behavior of men. Salaman is he who can say with the reciter of the *Bird*: "In God my help, toward men my freedom."

## EPILOGUE

*OR*

## AVICENNAN PERSPECTIVES

To terminate these pages with a "conclusion" would be to falsify both their intention and their hope. The simple word "epilogue" allows us, instead of closing a meditation, to prolong its perspectives. It is to opening some other Avicennan or Avicennizing perspectives that we shall devote these last pages; we undertake no more, all that precedes having been but the occasion to give a first form to researches whose complexity is sufficiently apparent.

We had not set ourselves the task of deciding just how far the intimate experience of the *man* Avicenna had gone or had not gone, or of imposing a definition on what that experience had or had not been. To wish at all costs to consign a great man's description to a file card, so as to pigeonhole him under common and expected norms, is perhaps to yield to the taste for classification; it is certainly inadequate to a personal destiny. We have said how difficult the situation of our philosophers always was within the Islamic community, and have quoted Ibn 'Arabi's remark connecting them with the great family of Gnosticism. That circumstances were more favorable to them in Iran than elsewhere is shown, in the seventeenth century at Ispahan, by the magnificent flowering of the school of Mir Damad. Avicennism and Suhrawardism there experienced a renewal whose effect was enduring. The present book has given us occasion to show that there is a relation between Avicenna and Suhrawardi, which is illuminated by their mystical recitals and by the significant fact that both felt the need to employ this form of first-person composition. **It is true that** Suhrawardi's project as a whole is nourished from an "Oriental

## Avicennism and Imamism

spring," the Light of Glory (*Xvarnah*), the concept of which dominates the philosophy of ancient Persia, and which Avicenna did not know. But the fact remains that the *Recital of Exile* in the *Occident* found its point of departure, as we know, in the last episode of the recital in which Hayy ibn Yaqzan initiates his disciple into the *Orient*; and it appeared to us that such a relation, explicitly recognized, was of major importance, not only for the concept of *Orient* and of an *Oriental* philosophy, but also for the entire *orientation* of Iranian spirituality in the centuries that were to follow. We shall consider one of its characteristic aspects further on.

Was it necessary also to decide whether Avicenna had really been a "mystic" or not? It seemed to us simpler to let his work speak, to amplify its vibrations as much as possible, by ourselves taking it in charge with sympathy and not with suspicion; having done so, we can only concur with the Iranian tradition that regards him as among the number of the *Ahl-e 'Erfan*. As for what the peculiar and original quality of his mysticism was, the personages of our recitals—his familiars and intimates—could convey it to us. To enter into controversy, we should have had to begin by arbitrarily delimiting the concept "mystic" in order to exclude the "philosopher Avicenna" from it. It would be an exhibition of ill-timed rationalism to undertake to lay down precisely where, in our *Hukama'*, the frontier between philosophy and mysticism lies; and dogmatism is not exactly the readiest tool for setting about an exegesis of the soul and its symbols. This exegesis we have attempted here, and nothing could be more foreign to it than a concern with arriving at judgments handed down as if in a court of law. Such jurisdiction does not lie within the authority of men, even were they historians. And it is to engage in something quite different from history if one tries, as we have done here, to discover the horizon pointed out to us by a gesture, instead of remaining with our eyes fixed on the pointing finger. Finally, it is thanks to exegetes of the soul that the conjunction of Avicennism and Suhrawardism was accomplished in Iranian Imamism.

## *Avicennism and Imamism*

An admirable and fertile example of positive valorization is afforded us by the way in which Avicenna's thought was understood and experienced in Iran, among Shi'ite Avicennans. It is not that here too, among the theologians and jurists, voices were lacking to proclaim their hostility. In this they were only



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

in accord with the sentiment that orthodox Islam has in general always professed in respect to our theosophers, and which manifests itself unambiguously even in a certain dream related by Majduddin Baghdadi: "I saw the Prophet in a dream. I asked him: 'What say you of Ibn Sina?' He answered: 'He is a man who claimed to attain to God without my intermediation. So I conjured him away . . . thus, with my hand. And he fell into hell.' " <sup>1</sup> It is not without surprise that we find, even in a mystic like Majduddin Baghdadi, this trace of a *rabies theologica* that does not relax even in dreams—or, rather, especially in dreams! Let us at once correct this impression by saying that the oneiric vision translates not so much the mystic's personal and conscious sentiment, as a collective hostile sentiment that he undergoes and endures, and which is manifested in dream under the features of the Prophet and in the judgment without appeal that he pronounces against our philosopher.

There would have been no outlook for Avicennism if it had encountered

1. Cf. the long chapter devoted to Avicenna by Muhammad Baqir Khwansari, in his *Rawdat al-Jannat*, lith. (Teheran, 1306), p. 244.—On Majduddin Baghdadi, cf. Reza Quli Khan, *Riyad al-'arifin*, pp. 218 ff. (a native, according to some, not of Baghdad in 'Iraq, but of Baghdadak in Khwarezm; disciple of Najmuddin Kubra, d. 606/1210). Another locus, if not the source, for this information concerning Majd Baghdadi's dream is in the *Forty Majlis* by the great mystic 'Alauddawla Semnani (d. 735/1336; the ruins of his Aramgah still stood until recently not far from Semnan, on the road from Teheran; what remained of the beautiful edifice collapsed some years ago under the weight of time). These *Forty Majlis* were collected by one of the shaikh's disciples, Iqbal Sejestani; the dream is mentioned in the twenty-seventh *majlis*. My assistant, Mr. Javad Kamalian, has done some research in his personal manuscript of the *Majlis* (a different version, in which the sessions are not numbered) and brings to my attention the highly edifying recital of a dream that came to the shaikh one night in the Jum'a mosque in Mosul (fol. 66b). The shaikh sees the Prophet in the midst of

an assemblage and questions him about several great spiritual personages: "Ma taqulu fi haqqi Ibn Sina? Farmod 'huwa rajulun adallahu Allahu 'ala 'ilmin' ya'ni: o mardt'st ke khoda-ye ta'aia ora gomrah karda ast dar 'ilm. Digar guftam: ma taqulu fi haqqi Shihabi-d-dini'l-maqtuli? qala 'huwa min taba'ih' ya'ni: o niz piraw-e Abu 'Ali Sina ast"—"What say you of Ibn Sina?' He said: 'He is a man whom God caused to lose the way by force of knowledge.'—Then I asked further: 'What say you of Shihabad-din, the assassinated [Shaikh]?'—He said: 'He too is a disciple of Ibn Sina.' " If we take this dream as if it simply expressed what Semnani unconsciously sensed that the Prophet must feel toward our philosophers, there is nothing more for us to say in this place. Yet the fact remains that when Suhrawardi, to whom no one denies the quality of *hakim muta'allih*, is nevertheless regarded as a disciple of Avicenna, the latter is decidedly "compromised," and there is occasion to conclude that there was felt to be an affinity between the two masters of the "Oriental philosophy," an affinity that exceeds the utmost expectations! (Cf. further our Post-script, below.)

## Avicennism and Imamism

only these negative attitudes, nourished on a hostility much like that with which the theologians of the West met it. Our interest is only in the application of the *ta'wil* for which the Shi'ite thinkers seem to have a congenital aptitude;<sup>2</sup> precisely by this means, those among them who possessed a philosophical vocation could not only keep Avicennism alive, but, led by it to new spiritual exercises, could also give it the benefit of a recasting of their religious sentiment "in the present." The dominant concept of Shi'ism, the concept of Imam, proves to have been so great a stimulus to eager speculation and spiritual awareness that perhaps it explains the fact that speculative thought had such a renewal at Ispahan in the seventeenth century, whereas everywhere else in the Islamic world the period of creative philosophy appeared long since to have ended.

To show how the figure and the thought of Avicenna were understood and experienced among our Iranian thinkers, we should obviously have to examine all the works of those who were the companions or the spiritual posterity of Mir Damad, *Magister tertius*<sup>3</sup> (d. 1040/1630). Our epilogue can but indicate the task. Only two testimonies will be invoked here. The first is that of the Sayyed Qazi Nurallah Shushtari, whose Shi'ite fervor was to make him die a martyr to his faith (1019/1610), and whose memory the piety of his people honors with the title of "third Martyr."<sup>4</sup> He was generous of heart; it was his wish that in the Islamic past all those toward whom he felt sympathy should have been disciples of the Holy Imams,<sup>5</sup> should have belonged to that Imamite religion whose name (*Imamiya*) perfectly characterizes the object of its devotion. To this end, in his great book he sometimes has recourse to arguments that in the view of historical criticism are precarious; in compensation, the

2. Cf. above, pp. 28-35, a brief sketch of *ta'wil*; the hermeneutic foundations of Shi'ism in general would give occasion for a very extended study.

3. *Magister primus* being Aristotle, and *Magister secundus* al-Farabi; cf. above, p. 128.

4. *Shahid-e thalith* (he was put to death in India, by order of Jahangir, who yielded to the insistence of the Sunnites; cf. Edward G. Browne, *Literary History of Persia*, IV, 447). The protomartyr (*Shahid-e awwal*) had been Shamsuddin Muhammad ibn Makki 'Amili, put to death at Damascus in 786/

1384, and the second Martyr (*Shahid-e thani*), the Shaikh Zaynuddin ibn 'Ali Shami, A.H. 911-966 (cf. *Fihriste Kitabkhanah . . . Sepahsalar*, I, 375 ff.).

5. That is, had been numbered among the *Ahl-e Iman*, "people of the Faith." As we know, in contradistinction to Sunnism, Shi'ite theology professes as foundations of the faith (*iman*) the threefold assent to the divine oneness, to the Prophets, and to the Imams who succeed them; cf. Nasiraddin Tusi, *Qawa'id al-'Aqa'id*, with the commentary by 'Allama Hilli (Teheran, 1311), pp. 103 ff.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

divinations of his fervor reveal indications to him, and allow him to employ them more *truly* than positivistic historical critics ever could. The second testimony that we shall invoke will be that of the studious Avicennan whose work has already been cited in the course of the present book: the Sayyed Ahmad 'Alawi, pupil and son-in-law of Mir Damad,<sup>6</sup> eminently representative of the type of Iranian thinker in whom concern to valorize the philosophy of ancient Persia is combined with piety toward the Holy Imams; this form of thought finds its finest expression in what may be called a Suhrawardian Avicennism Imamite in religion, which finally gives its peculiar physiognomy to Iranian Avicennism.<sup>7</sup>

The long chapter that Nurallah Shushtari devotes to Avicenna is highly significant. It sets out from the question whether Avicenna belonged in fact and by birth to Shi'ite Islam; then, certain texts calling for a *ta'wil* in depth, the interest progresses and concentrates on the question whether in any case Avicenna did not profess a conception of Islam in harmony with the Shi'ite conception; finally, it will be asked what meaning the concept of the Imam should in fact have for Avicenna himself and for an Avicennan Sage. This last question is, when all is said, the essential one. Otherwise, there would be at least a pious indiscretion in approaching such a man as Avicenna to interrogate him concerning his sectarian allegiance. He may have been born in Shi'ism; it is even probable. But so far as what made the Avicennan philosophy "significant" for our Imamite thinkers is concerned, the question of the sectarian allegiance of its author becomes of secondary interest. Then too, it must have arisen for himself in terms quite different from those in which the historian, as such, undertakes to raise it. What is of major importance is to know if the

6. Cf. above, pp. 58 ff. He is also the author of a *tafsir* of the Koranic verses that give occasion for philosophical discussion. We may here also mention another pupil of Mir Damad's, Qujbaddin Ashkevari, who in his voluminous work (*Mahbub al-Qulub*) expressly compares the Zoroastrian conception of the Saoshyant (of which he knows the name, Astvat-Ereta) with the Shi'ite idea of the return of the Twelfth Imam (first part of the work lith. at Shiraz, p. 144; cf. Muhammad 'Ali Tabrizi Khiabani, *Rihanat al-Adab*, III, 310, No. 482). It is needless to emphasize the extent to which Suhrawardi's

influence was prevalent among our Avicennans of Safawid Ispahan.

7. Cf. above, pp. 101-22, § 10, sketch of a comparison between Latin and Iranian Avicennism in respect to the central problem of angelology. It would now be necessary to define the characteristics that Iranian Avicennism may receive from Imamology; unfortunately, we can allude but briefly to this in the pages that follow. It is especially Ismailian theosophy that establishes the connections between angelology and Imamology (cf., for example, our *Etude préliminaire*, pp. 91-111).

## Avicennism and Imamism

speculative thought and spiritual life of Shi'ism could receive a new meaning from his doctrine, and if there were Avicennans to bear witness that they *in fact* thus understood and expressed it. Such testimony is provided by Nurallah Shushtari and the Sayyed Ahmad 'Ala'wi, and many others with them.

For an Imamite thinker concerned to arouse sympathy for his hero, it is perhaps a way of facilitating his task to begin by recalling how the great majority of the doctors and jurists of Sunnite Islam pronounced an anathema (*takfir*) upon Avicenna and his work.<sup>8</sup> In any case, it is beginning it in all frankness to cite a certain celebrated Persian quatrain, traditionally attributed to Avicenna and of which there is no good reason for denying his authorship. This quatrain is so incisive, and so well exhibits the style of a strong personality, that we translate it literally here: "The misbelief of a man such as I is not a common or an easy thing. There is no faith firmer than my faith. Only one man such as I in the course of all time, and he a misbeliever? Very well then, it is because in the course of all time there has not been a single Mussulman!"<sup>9</sup>

The statement is redoubtably ambiguous, so fraught with meaning that it would be regrettable to weaken it by any commentary. Could a supercilious orthodoxy be satisfied with it? To us, it seems to contain more than a trace of the high humor that was given free rein at the end of the *Recital of the Bird*.<sup>10</sup> To be frank, the anathema pronounced by the jurists was only the quite natural consequence of the profession of theses such as the eternity of the world, the hierarchy of mediating angelic Intelligences—theses that, in conjunction with the denial of bodily resurrection, are fraught with the most alarming implications for the idea that an ingenuously monotheistic theologian may entertain of the divine omnipotence.<sup>11</sup> To be sure, Nurallah makes much of the fact that these theses occur in the *Shifa'*, a book in which he holds that our philosopher simply sets forth the doctrines of the ancient Sages, whereas his other books are quite different. Our author's argument is inspired by his good will; but to tell the

8. Cf. Nurallah Shushtari, *Majalis al-Mu'minin*, lith. (Teheran, 1268), pp. 319 ff.

9. We give the Persian text of this celebrated quatrain (cited *ibid.*):

*Kufr-e-cho-mane gazaf-o asan nabowad  
mohkamtar az iman-e man iman nabowad  
Dar dahr cho man yaki wa-an ham kafir  
pas dar hama-e dahr yak musliman nabowad*

10. Cf. above, pp. 191-92.

11. It is chiefly these theses which Majlisi mentions, simply to point out their

opposition to the theology professed by orthodox Islam (*Bihar al-Anwar*, III, 205, for the *ma'ad jismani*; XIV, 60 ff., for the general agreement of philosophers as to the eternity of the cosmos). Yet he will cite in full, without comment (XIX, 54), Avicenna's text on the causes of the fulfillment of prayers; for here the philosopher's contribution is by no means negligible for the theologian.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

truth, it does not impress one as sufficient to cause any revision of the sentence of anathema.

This is why it would be no more of a solution to determine once and for all into which religious sect Avicenna was born at Bukhara. That the place of this fortunate birth was in territory subject to the Samanid dynasty is a fact that makes it highly probable that Avicenna was Shi'ite by birth.<sup>12</sup> This would be further confirmed by the choice that successively attached him to the service of Shi'ite princes; if Avicenna had not been a Shi'ite himself, his situation would have been more than difficult.<sup>13</sup> However, as we suggested, the essential datum for the significance of the philosopher Avicenna in relation to Shi'ism would not lie here. Is it not, rather, possible to discover in his work some trace of the central concept of Imamism? If so, how does he understand it, and how were the Avicennans who provide us with this testimony to their valorization enabled to understand it in their turn?

On this point, our two Sayyeds have meditated on the same texts, among which a special place falls to the last pages—in fact, to the very last lines—of the *Shifa'*. In broad outline, meditation on them carries us from a representation of the Imam as *realizing in himself the* ideal of the Sage or perfect gnostic—that is, as being in himself the archetype of the Sage corresponding to the Perfect Man—to a representation that is the spontaneous explicitation of this: it proposes the figure and the essence of the Imam as the *highest object* of mystical gnosis. That the perfect Sage himself in turn realizes this Image is a practical application that shows how Suhrawardian Avicennism was able to develop Imamology into a metaphysical and mystical anthropology, but also how this theosophical use of the central theologoumenon of Imamism inevitably put a certain distance between it and confessionary Shi'ism (at the same time that, in itself, it illustrated the latent power of the fundamental *ta'wil* of Imamism), for once the esoteric spiritual meaning was realized, the external confessionary

12. We know too how favorably the emissaries of Ismailian propaganda were received at Khurasan. Avicenna himself told Juzjani, his biographer, how his father and brother, won over to the cause, had vainly tried to gain his own adherence; it is perfectly understandable that the philosopher, even had he felt himself in affinity with the Ismailian philosophemes, would have found

it difficult to join the organization. We refer to this again below.

13. Khwansari (above, p. 244, n. 1), because he does not find the entire program of Shi'ite loci treated in the works of Avicenna, concludes that he must have been a Sunnite; of course—but this is to reason like an accountant.

## Avicennism and Imamism

attachment to the letter, to the legal Religion, becomes equally inefficacious and precarious.

The full conception of the Imamate corresponds to the ideal of a perfect city in which the simultaneously spiritual and temporal authority is concentrated in the person of the legitimate Imam, spiritual heir of the Prophet, repository of the true hidden *meaning* of the Revelation imparted to him. It perhaps supposes a particularly pessimistic conception of humanity. Nurallah Shushtari cites a passage from Avicenna's answers to the questions of Abu'l-Hasan 'Amiri, at Nishapur, in which a series of not very flattering images shows the necessity for a chief whose legitimate authority does not emanate from those whom he is called on to govern. "As for the conditions necessitating the khalif," Avicenna writes, "why, as we know, he who is to govern animals should not himself be an animal. No, it must at least be some little boy more intelligent than they. It is not right that he who is to rule over the vicious should himself be one of the vicious. It is not right that he who is to rule over the mass should himself be one of the mass."<sup>14</sup> Perhaps, as Nurallah thinks, the context tends to establish the necessary authority of the Imam, whose humane-divine condition is in its essence superior to that of ordinary humanity.

In any case, the reference here would be only to the temporal Imamism whose ephemeral triumphs (that of the Ismailian Fatimids, for example) inevitably marked a hardening, then a decline, of the spiritual doctrine.<sup>16</sup> It is rather from the fatality of its temporal failures that Imamism draws its deep meaning, the reason for its permanent protest. It is with the idea of the "hidden Imam," the "great occultation" intensifying the eschatological meaning, that a spiritual Imamism could maintain itself and could provide our mystical theosophers with the occasion for a *ta'wil* leading it back to the idea of the invisible royalty of the perfect Sage, whose mere secret presence, unknown to the multitude of men, at once suffices and is necessary for the leaven of Wisdom to continue to ferment among them and for the perpetuation of a humanity of which the Imam is the "pole" (*qutb*). And this "occultation" would much better correspond to the denouement of our *Recital of Salaman and Absal*—so true is it that when a symbol proves to be a central symbol, it shows an extraordinary poly valence. It may even be that the drama of Absal (the perfidies that

14. Cited in *Majalis*, p. 320. The answers to Abu'l-Hasan al-'Amhi (*al-Majalis al-sab'*) are given under No. 20, p. 85, in Anawati, *Bibliographic* (the manuscript was not accessible to us).

15. Cf. *our Etude preliminaire*, pp. 10 ff.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

hound him, his "occultation" in the manner of an apotheosis beyond the visible scene of history, etc.) can also be read in a satisfactory Imamite sense. We shall even add that one way of giving all their weight to the initiatory allusions in the prologue to the *Recital of the Bird* would be to read it as the recital of a "Quest for the hidden Imam," the invisible King, "occulted" in his inviolable sanctuary, whose Messenger could easily be identified with some emissary from an esoteric hierarchy. This "epilogic" suggestion may find place here: to include it in the body of the book would have been to give the latter a premature orientation.

But the text that above all occupies the attention of our Sayyeds is the closing lines of the great *Kitab al-Shifa'* ; and indeed they seem allusive to an uncommon degree. Let us quote them here: "He in whom speculative wisdom and practical wisdom are united," Avicenna writes, "is already blessed. If in addition he is invested with the qualities proper to Prophets, lo, he becomes almost a God in human form [*ṭabb insani*], and it is almost permissible to render him a cult of adoration after God, for he is the *King of the terrestrial world*, the khalif of God in this world." For our two authors, there is no doubt that this characterology applies literally to the First Imam, 'Ali ibn Abi-Talib, Emir of the Faithful, who, according to a unanimous opinion, possessed both speculative and practical wisdom in the highest degree, in addition to his charismatic and thaumaturgic gifts.<sup>16</sup>

The Sayyed Ahmad 'Alawi prepares his exegesis of this Avicennan text, for which he does not conceal his admiration (*wa-ni'ma ma qala!*), by citing a passage from the *Mi'raj-Namah*, whose attribution to Avicenna he does not question.<sup>17</sup> Two *hadith* figure in it, suggesting a *ta'wil* that will safely conduct

16. Cf. *Majalis*, p. 319. Nurallah devotes rather a lengthy discussion to the passage in which Avicenna (*Shifa'*, II, 652) examines the possible case of a khalif ill-versed in matters of religion having to turn to a Sage, as 'Umar was obliged to do. Since the possibility in itself contradicts the full definition, Nurallah shows that Avicenna had in mind in this instance a khalifate not in the proper sense (*khilqfat-e haqiqi*), but a purely metaphorical one (*majazi*), fit for no more than to maintain the appearance of an external order.

17. In complete accord with a whole

Iranian tradition (cf. above, pp. 165 ff.). Sayyed Ahmad cites the *Mi'raj-Namah* in Arabic (which he doubtless translates himself); the passage corresponds to p. 11 in our manuscript cited above (p. 170, n. 10), and comes a little before the end of the long prologue to which we have referred (above, p. 170). We here make use of a very long gloss by the Sayyed, one of those reproduced in the margins of the edition of the *Shifa'* lithographed at Teheran. It begins at the top of p. 652 (vol. II). With a little patience, and by holding the book upside down, the reader will find the beginning of it in the

## Avicennism and Imamism

our Imamite philosophers to their goal. The Prophet, addressing the First Imam ("Center of Wisdom, Heaven of Essential Reality"), speaks as follows: "While the common run of mankind approach the Creator through every kind of piety, do thou approach Him by every form of intelligence: thou art before them all." And again: "O 'Ali! while men take such pains to multiply their acts of adoration, do thou attend to Knowledge of the intelligible world [*ma'qul*], so that thou shalt be before them all." Such words, the author of the *Mi'raj-Namah* remarks, could be addressed only to a being who, amid the Companions,<sup>18</sup> themselves already the chosen among men, was like the intelligible (*ma'qul*) amid the sensible (*mahsus*). Here, then, with the appeal to the philosophical cult, to the divine service that, for the Sage, constitutes Knowledge, we have the Imam's investiture exalted to a metaphysical plane that is higher *toto coelo* than the plane of empirical history, where the significance of Imamism would be reduced to a competition for power between the legitimate 'Alids and the Sunni khalifs.

Hence the Imam appears as the Perfect Man, he **who** realizes the type of the perfect gnostic (*al-'arif al-kamil*). To extend his characterology, the Sayyed Ahmad has recourse to expressions that effortlessly combine the Avicennan and the Suhrawardian vocabularies, to such an extent is their interconnection already a fact of experience. In the course of the present book, we had emphasized the transition that their own respective mystical recitals allow us to make in thought between Avicenna and Suhrawardi. The prologue to the *Recital of Occidental Exile* referred us to the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, and thus invited us to read it first; we were then able to apprehend the "progression" that led from one to the other, on to the final "resolution" in the *Recital of Salaman and Absal*, which, by Suhrawardi's own testimony, conceals the *Mysterium magnum*. Here, our Shi'ite philosophers invite us to a parallel progression: it consists in immediately subjoining to the last lines of Avicenna's

right-hand corner. The writing then recovers itself, proceeds down the side and lower margins, where the gloss is interrupted, but it is finally found to continue on the following page. It is this exhausting hunting that makes using this kind of edition practically impossible. We here cite from the fine MS already mentioned above (p. 58, n. 22). The gloss begins at the foot of fol. 248<sup>b</sup> and fills several pages. It is attached

to the words *hatta la a'rafa minhu* (*Shifa'*, *ibid.*, 1. 4), which for our commentator unquestionably refer to the First Imam.

18. According to the text of our *Mi'raj-Namah* and that of Sayyed Ahmad. Nurallah gives the same passage "after Avicenna," without citing the *Mi'raj-Namah*, and reads "amid the common run of mankind" (p. 320).



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

*Shifa'* the prologue to Suhrawardi's *Hikmat al-Ishraq*, in which the perfect Sage is described as invested with such qualities and prerogatives that Imamism could recognize its own archetypal figure in him.<sup>19</sup> In fact, a brief modulation is enough to pass from the epilogue of the former to the prologue of the latter; the progression reduplicates the one that already made possible our transition from the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* to the *Recital of Occidental Exile*; but, brief as the transition is, it carries us across a threshold, gives us entrance into a new tonality, that of the authentic "Oriental philosophy" demanded by Suhrawardi. How characteristic and essential the curve of thought thus drawn can be, the entire Iranian posterity of our two philosophers is there to testify.

In a few lines Sayyed Ahmad sketches the ideal figure of the Sage as, realized in the person of the First Imam, it appeared to the mental vision of a pupil of Mir Damad. In accordance with his first constitutive nature, his first "creation" (*fitrat ula*), he is invested, through the organ of his *intellectus materialist* with a sacrosanct, "hieratic" virtuality (*quwwat qudsiya*). Through his second "creation" (*fitrat thaniya*) *in actu*, perfect worthiness is actualized in him to realize the *intellectus adeptus*. He then becomes a copy, an exemplar, in which all the universes of being are transcribed; he becomes an intelligible universe (*'alam 'aqli*) in himself, and all this is genuinely Avicennan; we have already encountered the equivalent Latin term: *saeculum intelligibile*.<sup>21</sup> Arrived at this high maturity, in which the perfection of Knowledge and the experience of *theosis* (*ta'alluh*) combine, he is the consecrated "theosophianic" Sage (*muta'allih mutaqaaddis*), and these last expressions refer to the Suhrawardian terminology.<sup>22</sup> In addition, he is invested both with the prophetic qualities of the Messenger and with those that consecrate the spiritual dignity of his Legatee, his spiritual heir (*wasiya, wiratha*), and these last prerogatives refer to the Shi'ite conception of the Imam. In short, "he is the King of the terrestrial world and khalif of God in this world, as Avicenna says. He is like a light at the summit of a very high mountain." The characterology of the Sage as it follows from the concluding passage of the *Shifa'* is thus understood as integrating in his person a collection of traits that are at once Avicennan, Suhrawardian, and Imamite.

19. Cf. our edition of the *Hikmat al-Ishraq*, § 4, pp. 10 and 11, and our "Prolegomenes II," pp. 21 and 54.

20. That is, not "material" in the sense of our ordinary speech, but as behaving

like matter in respect to the Forms toward which it is *in potentia*, as *intellectus possibilis*.

21. Cf. above, p. 117, n. 172 in fine, and p. 239, n. 44.

22. Cf. our "Prolegomenes II," p. 21.

## Avicennism and Imamism

We should no longer ask, as if it were a dilemma: is this the characterology of the First Imam *or* of the perfect Sage? The absence of this dilemma is precisely what differentiates our philosophers from the literalistic theologians. For, if the Imam *realizes* in himself, and at the same time *proposes*, the ideal of the perfect Sage, the Imam is *eo ipso* the supreme goal (*maqsad aqsa*) of mystical gnosis, a goal that is not only theoretical knowledge but also inner realization. Since the figure of the Imam covers the entire horizon of transcendence and transconsciousness, we perceive the significance that can be assumed for an Avicennan by an expression that we have already encountered (above, p. 240), and which describes the highest mystical state of the soul as "contemplating itself contemplating." The thought of our two Sayyeds, their *ta'wil* and that of all their brothers, have their beginning in seeing this homology that places the Imam in respect to the generality of mankind, even in respect to the Companions of the Prophet, in the position of the intelligible in respect to the sensible.

The Intelligible, Sayyed Ahmad remarks, is not some abstract thought, but the world of angelic Intelligences, the "world of Light"; the sensible is the world of the phenomenon, the world of death and Darkness. Compared with other men, including the Companions, the Imam is as Light to Dark, life to death, holiness and purity to defilement and corruption. Hence, in "Avicenna's synthetic declaration, the subtle allusion inspired in him by the celestial world," we are to understand this: the meditation of the Sages is concerned only with the Intelligibles; the goal of sophianic Knowledge (*'ulum hikmiya*) is, by virtue of the sacred Intelligibles, to actualize in the soul a perfection that abides through the soul's own perennity. To refer to the Imam as to that Intelligible means that the Imam is both the supreme goal and the original goal (*maqsad asli*) by virtue of which the perfect soul becomes perennial, adorned with all the beauties of mystical gnosis, with all the ornaments of faith (*iman*, in the Shi'ite sense of the word), filled with the joy of all the degrees of Paradise. As for all that is not the Imam, it is all in the class of sensible things, in which the soul can find neither its perfection nor its survival. In short, only the Knowledge, the *gnosis* of the Imam, realizes this perfection, sums up all that the firm assurance of faith and the hope of desires can aspire to.<sup>23</sup> Hence, since

23. Cf. Sayyed Aljmad, *Miftah* foll. 249<sup>a</sup> and 249<sup>b</sup>; Shushtari, *Majalis*, p. 320. If there is not verbal identity between the two texts that we combine here (one is in

Arabic, the other in Persian), there is perfect agreement in their interpretation of Avicenna's statements and intentions.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

the Imam proposes as the goal of mystical gnosis the archetype that he himself realizes, Imamology as such also defines and represents the goal and the achievement of mystical anthropology as such.

To develop all the consequences of this would be now to enter the domain of esoterism. We shall confine ourselves to mentioning the esoteric exegesis of the "splitting of the moon" (Koran liv:1), as given in the *Dabestan al-Madhahib*, because it continues this same *Mi'raj-Namah* attributed to Avicenna,<sup>24</sup> and because we have already referred to it in this book.<sup>26</sup> The esoteric sense of the "explosion" as figuring the conjunction of the soul with the Active Intelligence can be stated in Avicennan as well as in Ishraqian terms;<sup>26</sup> in any case, every mystic in his turn becomes either the "seal of prophecy" or the *Qa'im maqam*, the Imam of the Anthropos, the ideal or spiritual Adam (*Adam ma'navi, ruhani*), spiritual lord or Angel of humanity (*rabb al-nu-e insani*), and the tenth of the "Cherubs," to whom as visible terrestrial typification Ismailian theosophy gives the Imam of each Period, all the *hudud*, the members of the "Order," forming his "temple" or mystical body.

Certainly, we must be extremely cautious in comparing Ismailian and Avicennan angelology; there is external homology, but the inner structure differs. The fact is that, from the time of its political ruin, Ismailian thought survived clandestinely; a crypto-Ismailianism, especially in Iran, may have encouraged the interpenetration of doctrines whose form disguised it, as is notoriously the fact in the case of Iranian Sufism. The text of the *Dabestan* shows some trace of this phenomenon; it even reveals the tendency, always latent in Shi'ism, and not only in extremist Shi'ism, to reverse the relation of primacy between the Prophet and the Imam, to the latter's advantage. This reversal arises from an intimate feeling: from *faith* that the religion of the Law is not definitive; the coming reign of the Imam signifies precisely the abrogation of the Law and the advent of the pure "religion of the Resurrection." And such had been the significance of the Great Resurrection proclaimed at Alamut on August 8, 1164.<sup>27</sup> There is here a complex of thoughts and events, the study of whose surviving texts has by no means been carried far enough yet to enable us to rethink all their data. The little that we quickly review here

24. Cf. our "Prolegomenes II," pp. 53-54; the *Dabestan* (p. 264), although drawing from Sa'inaddin Ispahani's little treatise, for its own part insists on the investiture of every mystic.

25. Cf. above, p. 23 and p. 168, n. 8.

26. Unfortunately, we cannot here dwell on this exceptionally important text; we must return to it elsewhere.

27. Cf. our *Etude preliminaire*, pp. 22-25, context of the allusions made here.

## Avicennism and Imamism

is intended to suggest the whole understratum of intimate protest and invincible hope—in short, all the intentions that all our philosophers found themselves free to formulate secretly by making their own and adopting the terminology and the representations of Imamism.

This is not a phenomenon that began in Iran in the sixteenth century, with the Safawid period. All that we have just analyzed or sketched we find on the whole already formulated by Shahrāzūrī in the thirteenth century, in his commentary on Suhrawardī's *Hikmat al-Ishraq*. Even as early as the prologue, where Suhrawardī, describing the perfect Sage as in his person combining at their highest the capacity of the speculative philosopher and the mystical experience of the "theosophianic" Sage, proclaims the necessity that the earth should never be without one of these Sages or a group of them, Shahrāzūrī cites in confirmation a sermon by the First Imam, who declares in his peroration: "Must Knowledge die because those who are its props die? No! Earth is never without a Maintainer [*qa'im*] who maintains its Proofs, whether publicly and openly or in secret and under oppression, so that the divine Proofs and the indubitable testimonies shall not be destroyed. How many are they? Where are they? It matters not. Their number is minute, their value is without price. They themselves disappear, but their maxims remain in men's hearts. It is by them that God maintains His Proofs, so that they may transmit them to their peers, and deposit them in the hearts of those who resemble them."<sup>28</sup> Here, then, the First Imam is himself cited to testify to the perfect Sages as his successors. Nothing could better confirm the "Imamate" that Suhrawardī, in common with the concluding passage of the *Shifa'*, claims for the perfect Sage; and the latter, even though invisible to the generality of men, ignored by the mass, is none the less the mystical King of the world, he who "maintains" in it the presence and energy of a Wisdom without which unconscious humanity would perish in a catastrophe that it cannot even conceive.

This Avicenna-Suhrawardian "Imamism" here shares in a vision also formulated by other esoteric traditions. The question of Avicenna's sectarian allegiance seems to us to be now left rather far behind. Between the limited ideological field in which it arises, and this philosophic and spiritual "Imamism" that the *ta'wil* of the Sage develops by shattering limits, there is a distance comparable to that which can be etymologically measured by such terms as "become a convert to" and "integrate into oneself." We can still better understand why, despite the fervent arguments of his father and his brother, Avi-

28. Cf. our edition of the *Hikmat al-Ishraq*, pp. 302-03.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

cenna always refused to "go over" to Ismailianism.<sup>29</sup> Cases of transfer from the sect of the Twelve to the sect of the Seven were not rare among Shi'ites; perhaps this was actually the case with another great personality in the religious history of Iran, Nasir-e Khusraw.<sup>30</sup> But our philosopher's *ta'wil* enabled him to "go over" to another Imamism, in comparison with which the Imamism based on the legitimacy of the 'Alid Imams by corporal descent was but a symbol in the sensible world. Avicenna has thus revealed to us something better than a secret that, after all, belongs only to himself; he has as it were pointed out to us by a gesture the way in which an exegesis of the soul transfers the immediate data to a higher plane. And it is of capital importance that there have been in the Iranian Imamite tradition some souls lofty enough to understand him, and thereby to justify the significance that its speculative resources give to Shi'ism in the spiritual history of humanity.

This transfer, or, more precisely, this anaphora from a lower to a higher plane, has also been shown to be necessary by Nasiraddin Tusi, the commentator on Avicenna, who was his posthumous defender against Shahrastani, and who was no less familiar with the Shi'ism of the Seven than with the Shi'ism of the Twelve. The true Knowledge of the Imam, he writes, is neither that of his physical person nor that of his name or corporal genealogy; such knowledge is within the capacity of any enemy or any misbeliever. Nor is it the knowledge of the ingenuous adept whom his enthusiasm has rallied to the cause. No, it is a deeper knowledge by far—a knowledge of the Self (*dhat*) of the Imam, or, rather, of the Self that *is* the Imam, and it is perceiving what *makes* the Truth and the Reality of his qualifications (*haqiqat-e sifat*). This is a knowledge absolved and purified from every other form of consciousness and knowledge.<sup>31</sup> We could here mention comparatively what is signified in Buddhist terminology by knowledge of the Buddhas not in their "body of transformation" but in their "body of Essence" (*Dharmakaya*), and we could also cite the predilection

29. Cf. below, pp. 314-18, nn. 13 ff., a passage in which the Persian commentator on *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* indulges in a brief polemic against the Ismailian *ta'wil*. Avicenna, who was an admirable practitioner of *ta'wil*, could certainly be in agreement with the Ismailian premises of the *ta'wil*; but to apply these premises in philosophy—that is, to lead them to the *ta'wil shakhsi*, or

personal *ta'wil*—what was necessary was precisely not to be "converted," to remain free in respect to the Ismailian "organization" that regarded itself as the repository of *ta'wil* and created the danger that symbols would pass into dogmas.

30. Cf. our *Etude préliminaire*, p. 28.

31. Cf. *Tasawwurat*, ed. Ivanow, p. 93 of the Persian text.

## Symbolism and Presence

with which the Christian Apocrypha of Gnostic origin recall and dwell on the conversations with Christ in his "glorified body," *post resurrectionem*. It would be the occasion to remind the reader that the characteristic problems of Christology have found their homologue in Imamology.<sup>32</sup>

One is now naturally led to inquire into the psychic organ through which this Imamic reality can be perceived, and through which meditation can apprehend all the figures of Imams as exemplifying a single and eternal Imam. This does not "happen" on the plane of sensible perception of the physical events of history. When Shaikhism teaches that even today one must *see* the Imam "in Hurqalya,"<sup>33</sup> it refers us to an intermediary world that, for Avicenna, is situated between the physical cosmos and the world of pure archangelic Intelligences, and which Suhrawardi calls the "intermediate Orient." It is the world in which, with and through the metamorphosis of the soul, the transmutation of all things into symbols is performed; it is, then, the world of symbol at once in its autonomy, since it requires a substance of its own in order to refer to what it symbolizes—and in its *transcendence*, since by thus subsisting, it refers, trans-fers, beyond itself, while at the same time that "beyond" can be expressed only through it. This intermediate world, of which the active metaphysical Imagination is the organ, is, then, neither a "fantasy" nor the universe of fantasy (in the sense that would be justified by the nature of the third of the companions denounced by Hayy ibn Yaqzan!). Far from that, it is the same "Orient" that we have learned to know as the world of the *Animae coelestes*. Finally, these few reflections on the figure of the Imam as the highest symbol of the Quest of the Sage lead us back to what has been the central concern of this book: the symbolics of visionary recitals.

## Symbolism and Presence

In applying ourselves to the problems raised **not only by** the flowering but also by the perception of these symbols, our intention, as we propounded it at the beginning of this book, was in sum to inquire what *Avicenna's lesson* could be for us *in the present*. Perhaps, from the point at which we have arrived,

32. We can here only make a passing allusion to this theme of a future long study on the subject of Imamology, as we must here content ourselves with merely suggesting the importance of an Ibn Abi Jumhur

for the conjunction between the Shi'ism of the Twelve and the theosophy of Ibn 'Arabi.

33. Cf. our "Terre celeste et Corps de resurrection," pt. H.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

some new light falls both on the road that has been followed and on what was its point of departure. To compare Avicennism and the idea of philosophical situation was from the outset to concern ourselves with a possible valorization of Avicennan thought "in the present." As for the implications of the mental procedure conducive to our announced purpose of a "putting into the present," if it is true to say that Western philosophy, at least during the last generation, has understood the reasons for this together with its goals and techniques, it seems that these implications do not so easily manifest themselves to our Eastern confreres. We have, in short, the agonizing problem that has not ceased and will not cease to be raised by the meeting between the "traditional" cultures and the world that is a little too vaguely termed "modern civilization." The procedure that is here fundamental and necessary for thought is what we should broadly characterize as an *interiorization*. Choosing the exemplary case of *ta'wil*, which as it were suspends the letter of a sacred text in order to bring into view the *spiritual meaning* assimilable to experienced consciousness, we have termed the effort of freeing a thought from the "wrappings" of the letter "exegesis of the soul." It is an exegesis that the soul itself performs upon itself, which enables it, instead of *subordinating itself* to an external and foreign world, to *integrate* that world with itself. Instead of succumbing to the philosophies and experiences of the past, or instead of initiating a struggle, as if in confronting some external obstacle, the soul must learn to surmount them, to give them an abode in itself, to free itself from them in the act of thus freeing *them*.

Certainly, this interiorization requires a transmutation of the soul; it supposes a mode and an organ of perception wholly different from those of the ordinary knowledge that receives and undergoes all data ready-made, because it takes them as data necessarily given without asking *who* is the "donor" of them. To assimilate them afresh, the soul must each time understand what *it itself* did or had done; it can only "have done" with them, emerge from them, by understanding this, and it is by understanding it that the soul frees itself for a new assimilation, in a wholly new sense. Thereafter it no longer undergoes or questions the world or events; what it questions is itself. It is itself the world, the Event that enables the seeing of a world; hence Hayy ibn Yaqzan calls it the "rising sun." For this reflection upon itself no longer encounters any ready-made data; it projects itself toward a *vision* that is configurable only in a symbol. The Avicennan symbolism, its flowering and its use, as the recitals

## Symbolism and Presence

show them to us, open the difficult road leading to that pure Presence; in this sense, this symbolics can be *Avicenna's lesson* for us.

That lesson makes us spectators of a supreme effort for liberation that conditions "emergence" from this world, and performs as it were a *transmutation* of the physical cosmos that rehabilitates it as a universe of symbols; the transmutation necessitates such a radical change in mode of perception that it will become impossible to remain in agreement with the patencies and laws of ordinary consciousness (witness the humor of the closing lines of the *Recital of the Bird*). And precisely this, among others, is the reason for the weakness that we have had occasion to deplore in the majority of the commentaries attached to the mystical recitals both of Avicenna and of Suhrawardi—a perpetual falling back to a level of being and patency henceforth transcended by the symbol. To close these pages, we should like to insist further on a twofold character that falls to the constitutive *Event* of our recitals; we do so simply to prepare them for their role of "witnesses" for the general phenomenology of symbols. On the one hand, there is the *full* and autonomous *reality* presented by the intermediate world of the symbolic Imagination; on the other hand, the *spontaneity* with which that world comes into flower. The change that occurs in the soul, which this world expresses at the same time that it performs it, announces the soul's attainment of its truly personal symbol, and the greatness of the Event resides there.

In speaking of this full and autonomous reality, we could equally well speak of the *objectivity* of the world of symbols, "simply upon condition of not understanding the word in the sense in which the *object* is posed as exterior to natural consciousness of the sensible and physical world. Contrary to naturalistic interpretations and those inspired by Freudian psychoanalysis, which tend to "explain" myths and symbols by reducing them to sublimations of biological contents, the spontaneous flowering of symbols should appear to us as corresponding to a fundamental psychic structure, and *eo ipso* as revealing to us not arbitrary and "fanciful" forms but well-founded and permanent contents corresponding to this permanent structure. They are not mere projections performed at the "subjective" pleasure of the mind; they reveal to the mind a region no less "objective" than the sensible world. Their spontaneity is so far from being arbitrary that it exhibits striking recurrences in cultures far apart in time or space, recurrences that no filiation through historical causality could explain to us. The Avicennan symbols have given us occasion



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

to point out several of these recurrences; on the same ground, they have also motivated some references to the psychological researches of C. G. Jung.

Yet it would not be enough to say that the flowering of symbols comes in answer to an effort to "disengage" the intelligible meaning hidden "behind" each purely sensible reality. Such a schematizing of the process would inevitably miss what constitutes the peculiar reality and the autonomy of the universe of symbols: the symbol is mediator because it is silence, it speaks and does not speak; and, precisely thus, it states what it alone can speak. If one undertakes to achieve its meaning once and for all, in order to take one's stand on the intelligible signification that one substitutes for it, the whole mental dramaturgy of the Avicennan and Suhrawardian recitals vanishes; nothing is left but pallid "allegories," and our whole effort in the course of this book has been directed toward a fidelity to Avicenna's intentions that should keep our recitals from falling into such a vapidness, which makes any mental creation vain and sterile. There is no question of disengaging, of "abstracting" (and the whole Avicennan-Suhrawardian doctrine teaches that the human intellect does not perform abstractions, but receives the illumination of the Angel). For the soul, it is a question of at once undergoing and performing a transmutation.

As for the place and the assurance of this latter, we have insisted (§ 7) on the decisive importance that falls to Avicennism by the fact that it recognizes and affirms the second angelic hierarchy, that of the celestial Souls. For it is not what is called the subjective human "fantasy," it is the pleroma of celestial Souls, possessing pure Imagination, free of the senses, that is at once the place and the assurance of what we may call the objectivity of the world of symbols, that whole universe of the Imaginable which will be toponymically typified, among the Ishraqiyun and the Shaikhis, as the world of "Hurqalya."<sup>34</sup> It is "in Hurqalya" that our visionary recitals take place—that is, in the world of the celestial Angels-Souls who preserve the archetypes of prophetic visions and mystical visions. Perhaps the supplantation of Avicennism in the West by Averroism suggests to us how and why *ta'wil*, symbolic exegesis in itself, raised comparable problems on either side, while provoking entirely different solutions and attitudes. To see events "in Hurqalya" is quite a different thing from seeing them on the sensible and historical plane. To fix them on the latter, conferring on it a pre-eminence such that all occurrent reality depends upon it, is to make an impossibility of the integration—that is, of the inner and personal meaning "in the present"—to which we have referred; as a corol-

34. Cf. the study cited in the preceding note.

## Symbolism and Presence

lary, our recitals would be no more than the pleasant fictions of Eastern storytellers.

Doubtless, Biblical *ta'wil* in the West sought in *typology* a compromise that could save history—that is, by conferring a symbolic meaning on the event perceived on the sensible and historical plane. Unfortunately, this meaning is precisely what the historian pure and simple does not perceive. If it is perceived, it is not merely drawn out of the event; the event is transmuted by the mode of perception that leads it back (in accordance with the etymology of the word *ta'wil*) to the higher plane on which, spiritually understood—that is, transmuted into symbol—the Event then "occurs" spiritually. And if in this sense it can always "occur" again in the future, this means that it is in truth not an ordinary external event, but the Event of the soul, which, by comprehending it, *lives* it and makes it *its own* (and this is why, for example, all the events reported in the hagiographies of the Holy Imams have their importance, even if historical criticism must here waive its rights). This is not to preserve history, but to accomplish it. No more do the initiation of *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* or that of the *Recital of Occidental Exile* preserve the sensible physical cosmos; they go beyond it. And the *act* of this going beyond supposes not only the "objectivity" of the world of symbols into which the physical or historical world is transmuted, but also the spontaneity of its flowering in the individual soul. Without this objectivity and spontaneity, the context of the symbols would offer only a pallid doubling of the physical context, or a momentary and superfluous prefiguration of an intelligible context. The spontaneity here refers to the soul's transmutation, for it is only then that the soul attains not to a group of figures to be deciphered with the help of a code, but to the configuration and the vision of its most personal symbol, the central symbol of the Self, which is not knowable in any other way, and with which it enters into "rapt discourse in dialogue."

This said, some more explicit remarks remain to be made, which presuppose precisely that this has been said, even if too rapidly and concisely for the gravity of the issue. We have evoked a state of "rapt discourse in dialogue" that arises at the conclusion of the "march toward the symbol"<sup>35</sup> in which the mental vision beholds a Figure whose eminently personal reality must be understood and preserved together with its no less eminent reality as symbol, in as much as it is an archetypal figure "symbolizing with" the Self whose *vision* can be

35. For what follows, the reader is *ta'wil* as exegesis of the soul, pp. 28-35. asked to refer principally to § 3 of this book,

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

perceived neither by the senses nor by pure intellect, but only by the Imagination that is its place of epiphany (*mazkar*). The fact of spiritual experience thus described would exhibit an irreducible originality, if we were obliged to refer only to a typology of mystical experiences such as is current in the West, inspired, as is to be expected, by the demands of dogmatic theology. In broad outline, this typology distinguishes—or opposes—on the one hand, a "supernatural" experience attaining to the "supreme God," a transcendent and personal God, whose attainment is not within the reach of human forces, but is dispensed only by His grace; on the other hand, an experience allegedly of the Self, a "natural" experience in the sense that it is within the power of the soul's energies to produce it, and which, for that very reason, only allows the soul to experience its pure act of existing, but leaves it as it were suspended between two negations, that of the subjectivity of its ego and that of this supreme personal God whom it misapprehends or refuses because it cannot attain to Him by itself.

We have the impression that this classification, at least as thus schematized, prejudges what is at issue. It is not certain that the dilemma between a meeting with the supreme personal God *or* an experience of some depersonalized or impersonal Absolute holds. Otherwise, there could not be "discourse in dialogue" even in the case in which a personal Presence, to say nothing of a unitive vision, is experienced, without any possible or accepted identification between this Presence or vision and the supreme God of our theologies. Such will be the case for any consciousness in which the firm assurance subsists that the Supreme is, as such, beyond the known and the knowable. To the theological affirmation that He communicates Himself precisely through a gift of ineffable grace, the other will reply that such a communication cannot in any case be the direct imprint itself, but is a correspondence that postulates and announces a necessary individuation and whose eminent value is indeed a function of that necessary individuation. Such is the sense of the connection we have tried to bring out, in the course of this book, between mystical experience and angelology. If the divinity is indeed what it is, whether our theologies know it or not, every divine epiphany can only have the form of the Angel. It is here **that** the connection will be made between angelology and Imamology, particularly a subject of meditation in Ismailian Shi'ism (the correspondences between celestial and terrestrial hierarchies). The figure of the Imam, notably in Shi'ite Sufism, will magnetize so much devotion and love that it is possible to speak of an *Imamocentrism*, in **the** sense in which Christian spirituality speaks of

## Symbolism and Presence

Christocentrism. But, to be accurate, the comparison would have to take as the homologous term the Gnostic conception of Christos-Angelos rather than that of the theology of the Councils.

In any case, the homology permits us to discern that when Nasiraddin Tusi speaks of the true Knowledge of the Imam as knowledge of the Self that is the Imam, this alone is enough to break down the dilemma mentioned above, in which the typology of mystical experiences would be in danger of becoming fixed and ineffectual. Let us not forget that all the Suhrawardian mystical recitals are ordained to the Angel who is the Holy Spirit, Gabriel or the Active Intelligence, the soul's relation with whom has been experienced as so intimate and so personal by some commentators that in him they have seen the Perfect Nature—that is, the philosopher's personal Angel. It is precisely because of this that angelology leads us to pose the problem of the Self in terms that are absolutely its own—terms so strange to pure scriptural monotheism that the resistance of William of Auvergne itself acquires a symbolic value, and terms so unforeseen by the more or less agnostic classifications that, so far as we know, they have up to now almost nowhere been defined and rethought for themselves.

Such is nevertheless the concern that had led us here (above, § 9) to outline a study that, establishing connections between angelology and the process of individuation, puts us in a position to discover *who* is the "Donor" of the data that ordinary natural "consciousness" (which is then simply "unconsciousness") undergoes in ignorant passivity. This discovery is liberation of the soul because, knowing *who* is the Donor, the soul will also know that it is guilty of corrupting and alienating the data to the point where they impose themselves as a yoke. Simultaneously, this liberation places the soul in the presence of a *Self* that, while suprapersonal or transpersonal to it, on its part asks, through the personal Form that announces it, the most personal of relations. We are well aware that we are here only outlining problems that would require a much longer exposition to be fully intelligible. But since our Avicenzo-Suhrawardian meditations were its source, may this sketch at least find place here.

For if our investigation concentrates on the implications of the Avicennan theory of knowledge, which culminates in the figure of the Angel as *Dator formarum* (*wahib al-suwar*), we descry *who* is the Donor of all the data that ordinary consciousness (non-Avicennan consciousness!) believes that it undergoes passively from without. Certainly, there is a *passio* of the soul in its *intellectus possibilis*. But it does not undergo this *passion* from a material world of external and impersonal objects. Its *passion* is the *action* of the Donor by

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

whom Form is *given* to these still virtual *data*, when it receives the illumination of the Angel from whom also emanates the true constitutive light of its being, its own true Form. In brief, in so far as the soul cannot perform an abstractive operation, but receives the illumination that emanates upon it, floods its being, and in-forms in it and through it all that is yet the Formless, its cogitative *action* is rather a *passion*, its *Cogito* is really a *Cogitor* (to use von Baader's celebrated phrase); to recognize this *action* of the *Active* Intelligence or Holy Spirit is the "Oriental knowledge," the knowledge that is the *Orient*, the *origin*, of all knowledge.<sup>36</sup> By this reversal that discloses to consciousness the real *subject*, consciousness distinguishes *who* is the real Donor of the data, who is the Self, what relation the "I" experiences with its Self, as being a form of the thought of that Self. The idea of the *Dator formarum* implies that to *understand* the Angel is to be *understood* by him, since for that it is necessary that he irradiate his own Form on the soul that understands him. The *Ego* subject of the *Cogitor* is no longer the "egoifying" *ego* of the "Angelless" man. This latter is the man who is slave to the two sinister companions denounced by Hayy ibn Yaqzan, who, by separating the soul from its celestial Companion, subject the Donor's "data" to a demonic corruption such that they then close a prison of darkness around the unconscious and stupefied soul. As a perfect Suhrawardian or Ishraqi Avicennan, Sayyed Ahmad 'Alawi discerned the distant fatality of this demonic corruption when the Darkness that from the beginning weighs on the descending gradation of Intelligences and Souls led him to refer explicitly to the ancient Iranian Zervanism (above, pp. 58 ff.).

It is strange that certain presentations of the Avicennan gnosiology could sometimes reduce it to what we conventionally call a rationalism. On the contrary, meditating on its implications can orient us through Persian mysticism, and had here even led us to what in 'Attar appears as the mystery of the Simurgh; there too, what the Simurgh means as "Mirror" is nothing but this inversion of the Subject, so incomprehensible to ordinary natural consciousness. To reach it, one must follow the inner itinerary that the "cycle of the Bird" retraces for us.

36. A comparison to which Avicenna has recourse (in the "Physics" of the *Shifa'*) has been placed in parallel with Descartes' *Cogito* (G. Furlani, "Avicenna e il *Cogito*, *ergo sum* di Cartesio"). Whatever be the legitimacy of the ideal nexus (to say nothing of the historical nexus) thus established, **Avicenna's fiction would have only an epi-**

sodic meaning in relation to the final experience in question here; it concerns the act of thought by which the soul can be directly aware of itself as distinct from the body; **it** does not concern the transcendent condition that conditions this thought or consciousness recognizing the Agent who acts **it in actu**.

## Symbolism and Presence

And now this reminder of the mental itinerary that here led us from Avicenna's mystical recital to 'Attar's mystical epic gives us the occasion to emphasize a characteristic peculiar to Persian mysticism, as expressed in its vast poems, only two of which, one by 'Attar, the other by Jami, could be referred to here but whose evolution should be traced down to Nur 'Alishah, at the beginning of the nineteenth century. We refer to a mental process that may be termed a valorization of Images, and that seems to run counter to all the mystical teachings enjoining nakedness of soul, the stripping away of images, and so on. Comparatively, there would be occasion to cite the capital fact represented in the history of Western spirituality by the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola. There too we find a practice of meditation and mental realization based on the activation of Images, and as such this practice has been the object of sometimes violent criticisms, whose essence lies perhaps in the reproach of having disturbed the equilibrium prevailing in medieval spirituality between the mystical idealism whose inspiration was Platonic and the realism postulated by the Aristotelian gnosiology, and thus of having precipitated the evolution in favor of the latter.<sup>37</sup>

Yet at first sight, the position of our Iranian Spirituals forewarns of an essential difference, already announced in the simple fact that Avicennism is neither a pure Aristotelianism nor a pure Platonism. The intermediate world is not a mere means; it is the only issue offered for the dilemma that would force every spirituality as such to make a choice at the outset between the intelligible and the sensible. Here again the meaning of angelology reveals itself both in what it makes possible and in what makes it possible. On this middle way that marks the meeting and conjunction of what the unhappy consciousness elsewhere sets in opposition in order to torment itself with the thought of its "sin," Iranian spirituality has progressed with the firm assurance conferred on it by its nostalgia; it has lived this mystical experience in which love and beauty, in their reciprocal quest, are transmuted by one another into pure adoration. It is of this Quest that a Ruzbehan Baqli of Shiraz (twelfth century), with all the mastery of an expert psychologist, has given a most profound and delicate analysis.<sup>38</sup> Let us make no mistake: symbolic vision consists in something quite other than "representing" the sensible to oneself by attaching one or another meaning to it—for example, as we mentioned before, representing to oneself the events of a sacred history as such, be it

37. For example, E. Buonaiuti, "Die Exerziten des hi. Ignatius von Loyola," pp. 319 ff.

38. In his book in Persian, *'Abhar al-ashiqin* (edition in preparation, to appear in the Bibliotheque Iranienne).

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

past or future. The symbolic vision implies a concomitant transmutation of the mode of perception, and of the mode of being of the perceiver and of the perceived, which postulates the spontaneity of the Imagination that is the organ of these metamorphoses. An Imagination directed by a pre-established program would not suffice to bring to flower the absolutely personal symbol of the Self, as in the Avicennan and Suhrawardian recitals, whose originality lies just here.

This does not exclude such recitals in their turn serving as *themes* for meditation. Another feature of Persian mystical poetry suggests itself here: do these poets, indefatigably composing new recitals or new epics on the same themes, really repeat themselves? And do their auditors, indefatigably listening to these recitals, hear the same recitals? It is striking that what the reader—or the auditor—is on the watch for is the personal touch, however slight, the spontaneous factor that will modify and personally modalize the transmitted and received theme—for example, in Jami, when the furnace is substituted for the ocean in the epic of *Salaman and Absal*, or on the occasion of the major amplifications that we pointed out in the "cycle of the Bird." He who knows at what source the nonarbitrary spontaneity of symbols is fed, those regions of transconsciousness of which symbols alone reveal something, will agree that these are not merely "literary" variants.

Hence, if we recapitulate, the reader will understand that our whole effort was bent to another end than explaining Avicenna as a "man of his time." Avicenna's time, *his own time*, has not here been put in the past tense; it has presented itself to us as an immediacy. It originates not in the chronology of a history of philosophy, but in the threefold ecstasy by which the archangelic Intelligences each give origin to a world and to consciousness of a world, which is the consciousness of a desire, and this desire is hypostatized in the Soul that is the motive energy of that world. It is a phenomenology of the angelic consciousness, which develops from the initial act of the cosmology on to that angelology of knowledge in which, initially too, the experience of the Angel and the mystical experience meet and combine. The *ta'wil* of the symbols of this vision of the world, by accomplishing the implicit Event "in the present," is the more difficult because, in general, there would be a tendency not to lay much stress on the Avicennan angelology because it is bound up, at least so far as the exoteric letter is concerned, with an astronomy that is no longer ours, and because the preoccupations of modern philosophy scarcely assign a place on its program for anything like an angelology. In symbolic terms, let us say that the Avicennan champion will always find himself faced by the descendants of

## Symbolism and Presence

William of Auvergne, even, and not a whit the less, when those descendants are perfectly "laicized."

We suggested in a few pages (§ 10) what had been the stake of this battle waged for or against the prerogatives of the Angel Active Intelligence. Now, an earlier study had led us to discover, under the Persian name (*Ravanbakhsh*) given to this Angel of Knowledge identified with the Holy Spirit and with Gabriel, the Angel of Revelation, a possible reference to the "Virgin of Light" of Manichaeism as figure of the divine Sophia.<sup>39</sup> The Suhrawardian theosophy led us back through this Sophia Holy Spirit to a central representation of Gnosticism, whose recurrence is all the more striking in the West, in the cycle of homologous culture, since the occasion for it is precisely this same Figure of the Active Intelligence. This Figure imposes itself in the imperious manner of a central symbol, appearing to man's mental vision under the complementary feminine aspect that makes his being a total being. The mystical Iranian ' *Ushshaq* and the *Fedeli d'amore*, companions of Dante, profess a secret religion that, though free from any confessionary denomination, is none the less common to them all. We must here confine ourselves to mentioning the delicate and accomplished studies that have shown how the Beatrice of the *Vita nuova* typifies the Active Intelligence or Wisdom-Sophia, and how the arguments that hold for Beatrice hold no less for all the "ladies" of the "Faithful in Love," who resemble her in every point—she, for example, who in Guido Cavalcanti takes the name of Giovanna, or, still more explicitly, she who in Dino Compagni appears as "l'amorosa Madonna Intelligenza, Che fa nell'alma la sua residenza, Che co la sua bielta m'ha'nnamorato." <sup>40</sup>

Nothing could be clearer than the identity of this "amorosa Madonna Intelligenza" who has her residence in the soul, and with whose celestial beauty the poet has fallen in love. Here is perhaps one of the most beautiful chapters in the very long "history" of the Active Intelligence, which still remains to be written and which is certainly not a "history" in the accepted sense of the word, because it takes place entirely in the souls of poets and philosophers. The union that joins the possible intellect of the human soul with the Active Intelligence as *Dator formarum*, Angel of Knowledge or Wisdom-Sophia, is visualized and experienced as a love union. It is a striking illustration of the relation of personal devotion that we have attempted to bring out here

39. Cf. our "Prolegomenes II," pp. *segreto di Dante e dei "Fedeli d'amore,"* pp. 50-51. 79 ff.

40. Cf. Luigi Valli, *Il Linguaggio*



## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

and that shows itself to proceed from an experience so fundamental that it can defy the combined efforts of science and theology against angelology.

The high approbation that we have no thought of denying to these excellent studies does not, however, exclude certain reservations, which we intend less as a criticism than as a stimulus to their development. To begin with, in the phenomenon of the increasing precision that, from the regions of transconsciousness, exalts the figure of the Angel Active Intelligence, "Madonna Intelligenza," until it dominates the whole horizon of consciousness, no less a part, and indeed a greater part, should be accorded to Avicenna and Avicennism than to Averroes and Averroism; we had occasion to suggest the reason earlier in this book (§7). Now, the investigators have in fact insisted almost exclusively on the responsibility and influence of Averroes, so true is it that the destinies of Latin Avicennism after the period of the texts mentioned in this book are still to be brought to light.<sup>41</sup>

On the other hand, it seems that the generous enthusiasm of a reaction against the philologists of the letter in their blindness to the meanings of their texts has led to a certain going to the contrary extreme. It has been denied that any of the "ladies" of the *Fedeli d'amore* had the slightest "terrestrial" reality; the names given them are held to be only borrowed as masks for the divine Intelligence-Sophia. And the lack of a firmly based and established symbology and angelology easily led to conceiving this Sophia as a metaphor, as the "personification" of a divine attribute.<sup>42</sup> All the ground gained by phenomenology in this domain from the time of Dante Gabriel Rossetti was in danger of being lost without even being missed. The fact is that a false dilemma was set up by the supposed obligation to decide whether it was a question of real feminine figures *or* of the Intelligence-Sophia, just as elsewhere it is shutting oneself in a false dilemma to begin by limiting the spheres of being to the intelligible sphere *or* the sensible sphere.

Let us now attempt to gather certain first fruits that have developed during the course of this investigation into symbols and symbolism. There is, we said, concomitant transmutation of the mode of perception, and of the mode of being of the perceiver and of the perceived. Just as the typological meaning of the Event cannot be perceived by the historian pure and simple, whose perception grasps only its positive datum, the external or the exoteric (*zahir*), but can only be perceived by the exegete whose anaphora transposes it to the plane of the soul, where it takes place as Event of that soul—so the Figures contemplated

41. Ibid., pp. 82

ff.

42. Ibid., pp. 49 ff., 85.

## Symbolism and Presence

by the *Fedeli d'amore* could perfectly well be concrete and terrestrial Figures and yet be visible only to them. For what was visible to them was not the sensible Figure, indifferently and identically perceptible by any visual organ; it was a Figure whose beauty made itself visible only in these Figures, and also only for the mode of perception proper precisely to a *Fedele d'amore*—that is, for a soul that transmutes this epiphany and simultaneously makes it possible by welcoming the metamorphosis. This is why what the *Fedeli d'amore* saw was at once the Angel Intelligence-Wisdom and some particular earthly figure, but this simultaneity was actual and visible only to each one of them. The organ of such a perception is not the sensible faculties but the active Imagination; the sensible is not thereby abolished, but transmuted into symbol; correlatively, the intelligible can reveal itself to the mental vision of a human soul only through an Image-symbol, yet without this making it necessary to say that it is *merely* a symbol; rather, it has *all* the eminent value of a symbol. And this religion was professed alike by a Suhrawardi, a Ruzbehan Baqli, an 'Attar, a Fakhraddin 'Iraqi, and with them by all the "minstrels" of ancient Persia and Iran.

One matter remains to be mentioned, bearing on the connection between angelology and process of individuation. We refer to the fundamental opposition that our investigators have brought out between the religion of the *Fedeli d'amore* and the official Christianity of the Church.<sup>43</sup> The mediation of the Active Intelligence as Angel of Knowledge, *Dator formarum*, signifies an individual revelation, each time renewed for each soul that becomes fit for it and conscious of it, a revelation that irradiates upon it the eternal Forms or Ideas of being and beings. Thus we had occasion to recall how, according to the Avicennans and the Ishraqiyun of the *Dabestan*, the adept who unites with the Active Intelligence who is the Angel Gabriel himself also becomes the "seal of prophecy," and is raised to the same level as the Prophet receiving the revelation of the Angel Gabriel. The angelic mediation that is the very form, necessary and each time unique, of the revelation of the hidden and inaccessible deity completes a process of individuation that brings the self to the threshold of the transconsciousness in which it receives the announcement of the true Subject who thinks it by individuating it and individuates it by thinking it—that is, by revealing *it* and revealing this revelation *to it* (consciousness of its consciousness!). And this is why the *Fedeli d'amore* could profess the same cult for the same Intel-

43. Ibid., p. 90.

## POSTSCRIPT

### *Recent Studies on Avicenna's "Oriental Philosophy"*

Not only the writing but also the printing of this Part I required long months.\* Meanwhile, the Avicennan bibliography has inevitably increased. In particular, there are two recent studies that were not available to us in time, but the utilization of which would have proved a major enrichment to the present book. Their exceptional importance for the theme upon which we have placed so high a value here, that of the "Oriental philosophy" in Avicenna, as well as our concurrence with the thought of their authors, impels us to give a brief analysis of them: from their conclusions the concept of "Oriental philosophy" appears in a new and decisive light.

I. S. Pines' study, "La 'Philosophie orientale' d'Avicenne et sa polémique contre les Bagdadiens,"<sup>1</sup> rehandles the entire problem from the beginning. The investigation is so pertinently conducted that it seems to us to arrive at results that are wholly conclusive, whose sense is such that, for our part, we can only rejoice in them. It is impossible for us in this Postscript to dwell on the minute analysis of texts and the expert methods practiced by Mr. Pines. We wish to indicate at least the chief lines by which his conclusions are reached. The study finds its occasion and its sources in the numerous unpublished Avicennan texts first collected by the diligent labor of Mr. 'Abdurrahman Badawi.<sup>2</sup> They are texts dating from the very last years of our philosopher's life (d.

\* [[The original French edition is meant.  
— ED.]

1. Extract from *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge*. (We here write Bagdad and Bagdadians, since Mr. Pines has adopted this orthographic simplification; everywhere else we have adhered to the transliteration Baghdad. There is no inconsistency.) We mentioned this study above, p. 38, n. 41; at that time it was only

announced. In addition, since the publication of the French edition of the present work, Mr. Pines has also published a new study of primary interest for the object of our investigation: "La Conception de la conscience de soi chez Avicenne et chez Abu'l-Barakat al-Baghdadi."

2. *Aristu 'inda'l-'Arab* (Aristotle among the Arabs).

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

1037), written shortly before or after the sack of Ispahan (1034). We know that Avicenna's library was a victim of the pillage; one result was the disappearance of the *Kitab al-Insaf* (Book of Equitable Arbitration), a monumental work containing twenty-eight thousand questions, which Avicenna had neither time nor strength to rewrite and of which only a few fragments survived, those made available thanks to Mr. Badawi. Thus we now know that in it the philosopher divided men of learning into two groups: the Occidentals (*maghribiyun*) and the Orientals (*mashriqiyyun*), the latter appearing as vigorous critics of the former, whose weaknesses and ignorance are particularly brought out. It is precisely because the term "Orientals" thus appeared under Avicenna's pen that it was thought that at last the key had been found for the enigma proposed by the "Oriental philosophy" to which the prologue to the *Shifa'* refers as containing the philosopher's personal doctrine. Unfortunately, paradoxical solutions were reached, whose weakness lay in placing the East in the West (in relation to the orientation of Avicenna's topography), and in making it necessary to admit that our philosopher had used the word "Orientals" in two senses, and even in two senses so different that in one case he was "for" the Orientals and in another case "against" them. Mr. Pines' vigorous analysis puts an end to this superfluous paradox.<sup>3</sup>

To summarize, let us proceed by questions. Who are the two opposed parties? Are the Orientals the Peripatetics of Bagdad, contemporaries of Avicenna, whom he is opposing to the Greek commentators on Aristotle (Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius, John Philopon) as representatives of the "Occidental" doctrine? The affirmative was, broadly speaking, Mr. Badawi's thesis or, rather, presentiment. Instead, Mr. Pines will vindicate the following thesis: the *Kitab al-Insaf* treats of a quarrel that puts its author, Avicenna, a native of Bukhara, hence a Khurasani (in the old sense of the word, which was far wider than that corresponding to the present frontiers of the Iranian state)—hence an inhabitant of the countries in the East of the Iranian civilization—in opposition to the philosophers of Bagdad, a city of the Islamic *West* (p. 10). Second question: were the Orientals Avicenna's mouthpiece, or, as followed from Mr. Badawi's thesis, that of his Bagdadian adversaries? For let us say with Mr. Pines that it is impossible to admit that they were both at the same time, in view of the scornful tone with which they are treated (e.g., "these blockheads of Bagdad Christians"). The answer follows unequivocally from Mr. Pines' careful comparison between the epistle to al-Kiya and the extant fragments of the *Kitab al-Insaf*, and this answer will determine a fundamental agreement. It will no longer be necessary paradoxically to give the word "Orientals" a twofold and contradictory meaning, in order to admit that the Orientals frequently mentioned elsewhere—namely, in the notes in the margin of the *De anima*—are men-

3. Cf. above, pp. 36 ff., and our "Prolegomenes II," pp. 15 ff., where we expressly took issue with this paradox, though it was not incumbent on us to resolve it, since our concern was strictly limited to Suhrawardi's philosophy of "Oriental Light."

## Postscript on Avicenna's "Oriental Philosophy"

tioned in a way that leaves no possible doubt concerning the identity of their opinions with Avicenna's (pp. 11-12). Here, in view of the profit to be reaped for the concept of "Oriental philosophy" from the unambiguity thus established, we shall anticipate by saying that, according to these "notes," the doctrine of the Orientals tends, among other things, to show, by an attitude entirely contrary to the Peripatetic tradition, that the soul has an existence separate from that of its body.<sup>4</sup> In any case, the Orientals display their enfranchisement from obedience to Aristotle, of whom they are not sparing in their criticism.

If we now take our bearings, three facts seem to us henceforth established by Mr. Pines' labors. (1) According to Avicenna's plan, whether executed or not, the *Kitab al-Insaf* was to contain an exposition of the doctrinal differences that opposed the *Occidentals* to the *Orientals*. (2) Throughout the book, the latter served as figurehead for the author. (3) The book gave a large place to Avicenna's arguments against the philosophers of Bagdad (p. 15). Corollaries: Avicenna's Bagdadian adversaries are purely and simply the "Occidentals," as they in fact were for a man of Khurasan (this is a topographical datum that has never changed!); in addition, they themselves represent a tradition that goes back to the Peripateticism of the Greek commentators, which completes their quality of "Occidentals." As for the differences of opinion between the Orientals and the Occidentals, no doubt the major problem of the "hylic intellect" and of the survival of the soul played a great, or even the principal, role in them.

With these results thus briefly schematized, and the Orientals returning to their place in the Orient and the Occidentals being restored to the Occident, we can see in what new and meaningful terms it will now at last be possible to pose the problem of the relation between the "Oriental philosophy" taught by Avicenna and the doctrine of the "Orientals" whom the *Kitab al-Insaf* opposes to the Occidentals. To put it briefly: it is a relation of identity; "there were not two doctrines, but only one" (p. 23). In other words: there is no reason for differentiating between the philosophy of the "Orientals" of which the *Kitab al-Insaf* treated and the "Oriental philosophy" expounded in the *Hikmat mashriqiya*. It would even be inconceivable, not to say absurd, that the same doctrine was not intended in the two cases. If the contrary hypothesis was ever advanced, it was because the solidarity between Avicenna and the "Orientals" of the *Kitab al-Insaf* had not been perceived. Since this solidarity can no longer be doubted, the hypothesis annuls itself, to the advantage, let us say, of plain good sense, for "after all, one cannot believe that Avicenna elaborated and professed two different doctrines, which he called by the same name" (p. 25), and this at the same period in his life!

Nothing now remains but to attempt to outline the particular characteristics of the

4. Cf. above, pp. 82 ff. It is precisely that we were led to pose the problem of individuation in terms of an "Oriental anthropology."

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

Avicennan "Oriental philosophy." There is perfect agreement between the notes on the *De anima* and the six references to "Oriental philosophy" that occur in the commentary on the so-called *Theology* of Aristotle (fragments that also belong to the *Kitab al-Insaf*). Of these six references, five concern the existence of the soul post mortem. We had ourselves in the present book emphasized the theses that oppose them to other philosophies—such theses, for example, as the multiplicity of spiritual entities in the intelligible world, and the question whether souls preserve the faculty of memory after death.<sup>5</sup> For our part, we completely concur in Mr. Pines' opinion—that the "Oriental philosophy" was first of all characterized, as to its basis, by the doctrine of survival, and that one of its principal themes was to prove the possibility and define the conditions of survival (pp. 26-27). And, indeed, all our developments on the *Orient* and *orientation* in the course of the present book tend in this same direction.

We should like to make a more detailed investigation into the sources and the methods of thought that respectively differentiate these "Oriental" and "Occidental" philosophies. Specifically, we see Avicenna (in the preface to the book published some years ago at Cairo as *Logic of the Orientals*) add a non-Hellenic tradition to the controversy. The allusion is guarded; it makes it seem likely that he had information concerning sciences that did not derive from the Greeks; it insinuates that Logic, for example, was known by another name among the "Orientals" (p. 29). Let us remark in this connection that Khurasan in the broader sense constituted a separate area of scientific culture, to which J. Ruska had already called attention by his studies on the "Emerald Tablet."<sup>6</sup> As to Logic, we had pointed out here that Ibn Zayla, in his commentary on *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, identified it with the "physiognomy" that comes first in the initiation. For his part, the author of the Persian commentary suggested that this science "in which the Angels excel" should rather be regarded as a general hermeneutics of the soul. In any case, Logic itself is there experienced as an initiation, a purification in the Spring of Life, which, as we noted, would already transpose the ordeals in store for the student of the syllogism to quite a different plane!<sup>7</sup> In addition, Louis Massignon's study, analyzed below, incorporates into the program of the "Oriental philosophy" a genuine Oriental science: the *Jafr*, or philosophic alphabet.<sup>8</sup>

5. Cf. above, pp. 38, 53, 75, 123-24.

6. Cf. above, p. 13, n. 5.

7. Cf. above, pp. 154 ff., 160-61; below, p. 296, n. 1, and pp. 322-23, nn. 7-9; pp. 324-26, nn. 1-4.

8. Taking a place beside the "Oriental" science of physiognomy described at the beginning of *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. Compare further (above, p. 162-63) our remarks on Avicenna's criticism of the astrology of his

time and on what an "Oriental astrology" might be, with below, p. 290, n. 2, on the "science of natural properties." I have the impression that these remarks could be combined with what is suggested in a long note by Mr. Pines (p. 32, end of the note beginning on p. 31), in which the thaumaturgies of which mystical psychology treats are essentially differentiated from "magic" considered as an applied technique.

## Postscript on Avicenna's "Oriental Philosophy"

Whatever the complete program of the "Oriental philosophy" may have been, so far as the sources to which Avicenna rather mysteriously alludes are concerned we find ourselves led to a double hypothesis. (1) Did he, the *Oriental*, arrive at this non-Hellenic science by the sole effort of his personal meditation as a philosopher (p. 29)? For our part, we would qualify this by saying "under the guidance and through the illumination of Hayy ibn Yaqzan." In that case, we can say that the conception operative in the present book is fully in the sense of this hypothesis proposed by Mr. Pines. Or (2), did a non-Greek tradition, the source of the Oriental philosophy, actually reach him? But here Suhrawardi's answer acquires all its force, and I see with pleasure that Mr. Pines and I incline to draw like conclusions from it. *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* and, still more, *Salaman and Absal* could set Suhrawardi on the "Oriental" path, and this is the irremissibly documented connection between the two masters. But the "Oriental philosophy" combining Neoplatonism and Neo-Zoroastrianism, and drawing nourishment from that "Oriental spring" (*art mashriqi*), the *Xvarnah*, the Light of Glory, is certainly the work of Suhrawardi alone. Mr. Pines most pertinently evokes the memory of another great "Zoroastrian Platonist," Georgius Gemistus Pletho (d. 1452); we had ourselves elsewhere suggested the affinity between Suhrawardi, the Iranian Ishraqi, and this "Ishraqi" of Byzantium. For it is quite possible that Gemistus Pletho's master, the mysterious Jew Elisha, was himself an Ishraqi, like that other Jew, Sa'd ibn Kammuna, commentator on Suhrawardi (p. 34). Since the meeting between Elisha and Gemistus Pletho took place at the court of the Turkish sultan (very shortly before the fall of Byzantium), perhaps there is a sign in the fact that it was precisely at Brusa that we found the Persian translation of the Suhrawardian *Recital of Occidental Exile*.

In short, we can only record the concurrence between the positions that we had ourselves adopted and the conclusions that terminate this rich and stimulating study. A *topographical* meaning for the Orient of Avicenna's "Oriental philosophy"? Certainly, just as in Suhrawardi the Orient accords topographically with that of the Sages of ancient Persia. This meaning is eminently plausible for our Khurasani, living in a period of renaissance notable especially for the formation of neo-Persian prose, to which he himself contributed. But, after all, this meaning would be only episodic and metaphorical (*majazi!*). Let us recall Hayy ibn Yaqzan's teaching: the Orient beyond the physical cosmos, and the Occident of material nature. Mr. Pines also alludes to Hayy ibn Yaqzan's teaching, and does so to admit that "it is probable that these connotations favored Avicenna's design of presenting himself as the heir or the master of an 'Oriental philosophy' " (p. 33, n. 1). Nothing better could be said. For our part, the probability has a tincture of certainty.

We have just referred to certain sciences whose tradition is non-Hellenic, or, in any case, non-Peripatetic, which may well have figured in the program of the "Oriental philosophy." And now another study brings us an exposition of the content of one of them, a science constituting something like a "logistic" in the present sense of the word.

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

II. Louis Massignon's "La Philosophie orientale d'Ibn Sina et son alphabet philosophique"<sup>9</sup> is a sketch so full of matter and so rich in insights that we should wish to see it enlarged into a book. For Mr. Massignon, Avicenna, by his project for an "Oriental philosophy," sought to "realize a reconciliation between Greek philosophy, *falsafa*, and Semitic wisdom, *hikma*." The word "reconciliation" is perhaps palliative, if we think of the vigor that Avicenna exhibited against the incapable Peripatetics of Bagdad. As for the second term to be reconciled, "Semitic wisdom," perhaps it is not what the significant fragments of the notes in the margin of the so-called *Theology* of Aristotle first bring to mind. In any case, it is a derivative of this tradition that the *Risala Nayruzīya* valorizes. Such is the title of the epistle that Avicenna devoted to the *philosophic alphabet*, and with which, as containing traces of the project for an "Oriental philosophy," Mr. Massignon's original study is concerned.

A first remark: since the studies of the lamented Paul Kraus on Jabir ibn Hayyan, it has been known that, before the formation of the Jewish Cabala (itself probably derived from the Arabic *Jafr*), it is in the Greek Gnosticism of Asia that we come upon the first systematic essays on the symbolic value of the letters of the alphabet (p. 2). Mr. Massignon's doctrine on this point is very firm: "Contrary to a commonly accepted and widespread opinion, which is stubbornly maintained by the occultists, it was not in Hebrew (Judaism) that the systematization of the symbolic meaning of the letters began, but in Greek (Aramaean influence) among the Christians of Asia; and the Jewish Cabala, which begins with the *Sefer Yetsira*, seems to depend upon the Arabic *Jafr* of extremist Shi'ite Islam" (p. 16). Moreover, it is pertinent to mention that the Shi'ite Gnostic Mughira (d. 787, Kufa) taught that "the twenty-eight Arabic letters, deriving from the fall of the supreme Name of God on His Crown, at the time of the Creation, became the human Members of the corporal Shadow of God" (ibid.).

If, among the twenty-four letters of their Greek alphabet, Christian mystics **and** Gnostics (Marcus) isolated the vowels and gave them a special spiritual value, Avicenna did not in fact establish his alphabet under the inspiration of a Hellenistic source, but was guided by an Oriental tradition, that of Ismailianism (p. 4). We have mentioned in this book his father's and brother's connection with the Ismailian *da'wat*, and suggested the personal motives for his reserve. It is, then, remarkable, and at the same time perfectly understandable, that Avicenna makes his study on the philosophic alphabet one of the series of studies that he outlined on the Koran. In the last chapter of the *risala* under consideration, he applies his method to the mysterious isolated letters that we find at the head of some suras. He explains them as formulas of oaths calling to witness certain "divine beings," intelligible Principles or Relations (pp. 5-6). We refer the reader to the text (especially pp. 3-6 and 12-14), since we cannot here enter into the details of a technique that is as complex as it is stimulating to thought.

What we chiefly remark is Avicenna's intention to reform the earlier interpretations, while still adhering to a principle that Mr. Massignon firmly insists is the true one, **and**

9. Extract from the *Memorial Avicenne*,



## Postscript on Avicenna's "Oriental Philosophy"

with which we are fundamentally in agreement: it is that these mysterious letters must be maintained within the revelation of which they *form part*, and that we must see in them *sigla of classes of concepts* thus "spelled out" to the Prophet in dream (p. 7). It is to the abandonment of this healthy "integrism" that we owe certain fashionable theories, which scour the countryside as if in search of an "occidentalization" at any cost and in the worst modern sense of the word—that is, succumbing to a "disorientation" such as a disciple of Hayy ibn Yaqzan can only deplore. It is in this fashion that, even in Islam, certain critics, would-be "positivists" but really only nominalists, reduce these letters to conventional signs designating the manuscripts of the Koran used for the edition of the Vulgate of 'Uthman (!) or designating the number of verses in the sura (whereas the process of numeration is much later). What is actually involved is the *Jafr*, a traditional philosophical—or, better, sapiential—symbolism (*hikmiya*).

The central intuition operative here also makes itself felt in a valuable additional note in which Mr. Massignon energetically restores the *authentic*, in the full and radical sense of the word, against one of those more or less artificial reconstructions in which orientalist sometimes indulge when their knowledge loses contact with the soul. The occasion is a recent hypothesis that seeks to "explain" the vocabulary of the Koran as the result of a *conscious* proportioning of terms taken from various Arabic dialects, and even from Aramaic and Ethiopian (p. 17). This is of course entirely to lose sight of the spontaneity of the prophetic consciousness, totally invested by a transconscious power whose sudden irruption leaves neither room nor time for deliberations resembling those of a philologist at work in his study. If it is true that Arabic alone has preserved all the primitive consonants of the Semites, and with them the schematic symbolism of the letters, it is likewise in Arabic that Ibn Jinni conceived the *ishtiqaq akbar*, transcendent etymology or explanation of the total meaning of the three-letter (or two-letter) root by the combination of the meaning of the three (or two) letters composing it (p. 15). But then the presence of certain isolated initial letters at the head of certain Koranic suras shows that long before Ibn Jinni, the Prophet Muhammad had divined this etymological explanation of Arabic roots by the combined meaning (not merely the mathematical sum of the meanings) of their separate letters. The Prophet's spontaneous recitation of the Koran does not result from conscious creation of a koine, similar to the Greek of the Gospels; what he intuitively "intended" would rather be an *Ursemitisch* in its absolutely primitive classicism (p. 18). This is only a linguistic aspect of the religious phenomenon, whose integrity we preserve only on condition that we understand that the Prophet did not "construct" Islamism by a conscious combination of Judaeo-Christian elements, borrowed from all directions (p. 17). In still other words: it is Muhammad's consciousness reliving, under the Angel's "dictation," the scriptural antecedents of his "revelation" that "explains" the presence of these elements and gives them an extraordinarily new sense; it is not, inversely, their artificial combination that "explains" the prophetic consciousness as being its result.

We certainly have no intention of stinting our acceptance of this intuition, whose

## Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recitals

energy leads Mr. Massignon to the very heart of the prophetic consciousness, and enables him to show its uniqueness and its authenticity. We are even so much persuaded of the validity of this direct and uncompromising "method" that we should like to give our Avicenna the benefit of it; to tell the truth, it is precisely the effort that we have sought to make throughout this book. Then, perhaps, every trace of reticence in regard to our philosopher would disappear from Mr. Massignon's most suggestive study. It is because we tried to place ourselves at the heart of the Avicennan consciousness of the world that we believed that we discerned the unity of Avicenna's person, the homogeneity of his effort; this unity of a human personality, and of a philosopher's personality, cannot be that of a monotony or an invariability; it is the unity of a central intuition that subordinates to itself and orders all the successive data and experiences of life. In allowing Hayy ibn Yaqzan to *orient* us, to show us the *Orient*, we have become persuaded that Avicenna's "Oriental effort" was not that of an adaptation, of a compromise intended to spare his Greek masters, his final independence in respect to whom we have witnessed. It is certain that neither Avicenna nor Suhrawardi could be adopted either by the pure literalists (*hashwiyan*), or by the theologians of the type of Majlis!, or by the pure Sufis. But it is doubtless the originality of Iranian Shi'ite Islam that, despite everything, it permitted the emergence of an Avicenna-Suhrawardian posterity, which developed a type of Spiritual who did not fit into any of these categories; through a powerful *ta'wil* to which we have more than once referred, this line of "Orientals" "led back" to their origin the figure of the perfect Sage and the figure of the Imam by fusing them as in the unique symbol of one archetype.<sup>10</sup>

One last point, which it is a pleasure to record. We had noted some pages earlier that Mr. Pines indicated the interval between the "Oriental philosophy" of Avicenna and that of Suhrawardi, in terms that accorded with our own investigations. This transition, which, with Suhrawardi, was to set Avicennism on an "Oriental path" identified with a renaissance of religious traditions deriving from ancient Iran, is, in Mr. Massignon's view, initiated in Avicenna at a single point: *in music*, in the sense that Avicenna was the first to employ the Persian names of certain modes (p. 17). And this seems to us the happiest conclusion we can give to our entire book. The origins and variants of the "Oriental philosophy" will perhaps continue to be discussed interminably. Only musical technique, we know, is able at once to produce and to resolve dissonances. Let the last word here, then, belong to whoever, as Plotinus wished, possesses "the soul of a lover, of a philosopher, and of a musician."

10. Compare the words ascribed to the Prophet, in Majd Baghdadi's and Semnani's dreams, on the subject of Avicenna and Suhrawardi (above, p. 244, n. 1) with the

peroration of the sermon in which the First Imam is held to pronounce a eulogy on the philosopher Sages (above, p. 255).

278 FIN.

errata pages 15-16

has made it heard from generation to generation, those: who today people the same soil on which  
With the question put on this plane, we shall find ourselves freed to determine the name of the fa  
4. Cf. Nasir-e Khusraw, Six Chapters Etude preliminaire pour le "Livre reunissant or Shish Fasl, a  
12

fine word, in its archaic usage, reminds the philosopher of what he has "received as his portion."  
The fact remains that the term "Arabic philosophy" no doubt accorded with the schema of it prese  
To meet the difficulty, it has been suggested that the term "Muslim philosophy" be maintained. Bu  
5. We may here refer to the difficulties it prevents giving its own name, although  
Julius Ruska encountered in finding a design- it cannot simply be included in "Arabic"  
nation for the rich scientific civilization of civilization and the world of Islam; cf. Ruska,  
Khurasan in the fifth-eighth centuries, to Tabula Smaragdina, pp. 173-76. which the routine of our  
19

Part I. The Cycle of Avicennan Recital

philosopher in the Orient will free that past for a new future, by valorizing it through new significan  
For the moment, we shall content ourselves with speaking of "philosophy in Islam." The designati